Faculty Reflections on Accelerated Learning Communities

Editors
Lisa Silverstein
Community College of Denver
FastStart Coordinator

Elaine DeLott Baker,
Colorado Community College System
Acceleration Specialist

Joan Harris,
Community College of Denver
Reading Faculty
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Program Overview
FastStart began in 2005 as an intentional strategy to accelerate student movement through the developmental sequence. The program utilizes a holistic approach to address the cognitive and non-cognitive issues that impact student success. Students in the initial FastStart cohort were enrolled in two levels of developmental courses, compressed into one semester, with support from an educational case manager and a co-requisite student success course. Over the course of the program, two central formats emerged - compressed courses, comprised of two or more integrated developmental education classes; and team-taught learning communities that paired the highest level of a developmental course with a college level course.

From Grant Funds to Institutionalization
FastStart was initiated with grant funds from Lumina Foundation and supported with subsequent grants from Breaking Through, a joint project of Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the National Council of Workforce Education (NCWE), funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; and Scaling Up, a joint project of JFF and NCWE, funded by Charles Stewart Mott and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations. Faculty development funds were provided through a Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) grant, funded by the Walmart Foundation. By 2012, FastStart had offered 27 course combinations, taught by total of 78 instructors, and had been fully institutionalized.

Key Components: As the program matured, several key components emerged.
• A pedagogical approach that views the instructor as facilitator, where inquiry is incorporated into an interactive format that encourages critical thinking skills.
• A structural approach that compresses and/or links courses in a longer face-to-face class time, facilitating collaborative learning and providing opportunities for a variety of activities and delivery options.
• The integration of student services and instruction, through structured contact between faculty, students and educational case managers, including regular faculty/staff meetings focused on continuous improvement.
• A strong program orientation to clarify program expectations, including initial meetings between students and educational case managers, and ongoing contact at key points in the program.
• A focus on helping students make informed decisions about their career goals and corresponding academic planning.

Inquiry and the Faculty Learning Community:
The faculty learning community developed over time as a supportive, interdisciplinary environment where faculty could share thoughts and strategies about teaching, observe each other's classrooms, and reflect on their practice. Faculty participate in community building activities and work collaboratively in groups to share ideas and discuss topics, much as FastStart students do in their own classrooms. In addition to Interdisciplinary meetings with the entire FastStart faculty team, workshops, trainings and opportunities for structured peer observations are offered during the semester. All prospective FastStart faculty are required to observe a FastStart class and discuss their observations with veteran faculty and/or the program coordinator before teaching a FastStart course for the first time.

The "one-page' reflections presented here are an outgrowth of the inquiry process that underlies the program's commitment to continuous improvement. The inquiry board, formalized in CCD's online platform, Desire2Learn, provides an opportunity for faculty to capture their reflections on teaching, student interactions and the dynamics of acceleration. Started in Fall 2011, the board is still accessed and used by the interdisciplinary faculty for informal reflections and discussion. The themes presented in the one-page collection emerged from these reflections and discussions (see appendix).

Faculty Engagement and Student Engagement
One of the underlying beliefs of FastStart is that faculty engagement promotes student engagement by demonstrating the power of collaborative peer learning. In commuter colleges, such as CCD, where opportunities to engage students are essentially limited to the classroom, faculty strategies that demonstrate and highlight the impact of strengthening engagement between peers are particularly significant.

The “One-pager” Collection’ Process
As the richness and value of faculty and staff discussions became increasingly apparent, the team began to consider ways to incorporate these interchanges into an authentic professional development format that would serve both new and veteran faculty. The vehicle that emerged was the “One-pager” project, a collection of faculty voices that reflect on what works in the accelerated classroom, and why. To “kickstart” the process, all faculty members were invited to propose a topic of discussion that they felt would contribute to an understanding of the FastStart dynamic, or that would demonstrate how teaching a FastStart course impacted their individual instruction and beliefs about student success. Each faculty member who chose to participate met with the project’s editors to clarify the selected topic. The topics that are represented here range from reflections on acceleration, to learning communities and pedagogy, to observations of the FastStart teaching and learning philosophy and its impact on their individual teaching practices. Together, they provide a personal lens of staff into the “how” and “why” of the FastStart’s dynamic, communicated in faculty voices.

The Reflections: Faculty Voices on a Holistic Acceleration Model
Educational case management is an integral aspect of FastStart’s success. The integration of student support services with instruction, bridges the FastStart faculty and student communities. Rosalinda Martinez and Joanna Liebelt, FastStart Educational Case Managers, describe the interaction of case management and instruction in, “A Case Manager’s Perspective on FastStart’s Key Ingredients: Motivation, Engagement and Connection.”

In Peter Lindstrom and Sean McCandless’, “Learning Communities as Professional Development,” the pair presents a dialogue on how they interact with each other and with their students while co-teaching and sharing the classroom, students and time, and how their co-teaching impacts student success and their own professional development.

Brian Dickson and John O’Leary share their lively team-teaching philosophy, describing how their co-teaching provided them with a deep professional development experience as well, and how this reached their community of students, teaching together for four semesters in, “Work Hard, Laugh Loud: An Approach to Learning Community Classes.”
Gretchen Hack’s survey of English Language Learners offers a learner’s perspective on how a FastStart learning community promotes greater participation in a developmental English/reading environment in, “English Language Learners Take on FastStart Classes.”

In “Contextualized Lessons Create Collaboration,” Karen Jaramillo describes her contextualized assignment for integrated ESL exitors and native speakers in, “Cross-Cultural Interview and Analysis” for her compressed reading and English FastStart course. Karen offers her insights into student engagement, student relationships and how this led to a stronger depth of understanding for students.

The “Structure of Success,” by Peter Lindstrom and Crystle Rippe-toe, describes the role of structure and the corresponding student connections and peer groups that drive the class dynamic, promote critical thinking and impact student success.

Reading instructor, Joan Harris, explains how she integrates and contextualizes reading with Psychology in a co-taught learning community model that deepens student analysis and critical thinking in, “The Power of Two: Learning Communities Motivate and Facilitate Developmental Course Work.”

“Teaching the Science of Human Political Behavior: Hermeneutics, Dramaturgy, and Modeling Democracy in FastStart’s, “Introduction to Political Science,” outlines how Sean McCandless and Peter Lindstrom integrate developmental English and Political Science curriculum to help students arrive at a deeper understanding of both disciplines. McCandless and Lindstrom demonstrate how the concepts within the content of Political Science are used in the class through interaction and activity development.

“It’s Natural! It’s Organic! Integrating Reading and Writing in the FastStart Classroom,” by Lisa Silverstein, describes her application of democratic principles in community building and approach through various examples. Silverstein points out how the two subjects interconnect within one lesson, and how students make these connections on their own, helping them to understand the reciprocal processes of the two disciplines.

Jason Burke takes on the role and challenges of structure in merging math topics in a compressed format and shows how the structure of a compressed syllabus operates to promote mastery in his piece, “Reflections on a FastStart Accelerated Developmental Math Syllabus.”

“Peas and Carrots: How Developmental Math and Developmental English Blend Into One Class,” by Peter Lindstrom and Crystle Rippetoe, presents a conceptual overview of how two very different curricular concepts, English and Math, are integrated in a contextualized final project to reinforce the learned concepts.

In Kelli Hamner’s piece, “Collaboration and Collegiality in the FastStart Model,” Kelli presents insights of an instructor new to the FastStart community. She describes how peer observations in a colleague’s learning community class impacted her own teaching in a team-taught class and the parallels between the FastStart faculty as a learning community, the student learning community and how content is deepened by this unique structure.

– The Editors
Lisa Silverstein, Elaine DeLott Baker and Joan Harris
Peter Lindstrom, Developmental English Faculty

I graduated with an MFA in creative writing from Naropa University in 1999 and promptly became a carpenter, working in the residential construction industry as sub-contractor and small business owner. I fell in love with teaching, though, in 2009 when I first stepped into a classroom as an instructor here at CCD. Since my teaching philosophy is heavily influenced by the contextualization inherent in constructivism, teaching in the FastStart program has been a natural fit. I have taught in three different learning communities with three different instructors: Eng 090/Pos105 (intro to Political Science), Eng090/Mat060-Mat090, Eng090/Crj110 (intro to Criminal Justice). Each pairing has been challenging and rewarding in different ways, but all had the benefit of contextualizing lesson plans with another subject area as well as with real-world experience. And all have helped facilitate strong peer-to-peer relationships among the students, which makes any class more enjoyable and successful.

Brian Dickson, Developmental English Chair

Brian believes in cultivating creativity to energize one’s life, to promote learning and engagement, to being open to possibilities, and to being a community in the classroom. He has worked at CCD since 2005 and has loved and cried with the best of them while co-teaching with John O’Leary and laughing with the rest of the faculty.

Gretchen Hack, English as a Second Language Faculty

My teaching background began with an M.A. in English from CU-Denver, after which I began to teach mainly composition classes, with some literature classes, at Denver colleges. During my 20 years of teaching I have found a special interest in English Language Learners, and in 2000 began to focus on that population at Community College of Denver. I now teach one FastStart ESL class of Advanced Composition, after which the students are ready for their college-level composition course. My aim is to prepare the students for the wider world of both their future academic majors and their careers, especially in their written communication. Thus I try to instill a sense of our class being a community of scholars working on our English skills of listening, reading, speaking, and especially writing – together. As part of that preparation I expose them to people from the world of work, both native and nonnative English speakers, through class interviews, which I hope encourages the students to believe that they, too, can achieve their goals.

Joan Harris, Reading Faculty

After teaching high school social studies, journalism, and English for 15 years, I started my work with the CCD FastStart program in 2010. I have a B.A. in Technical Journalism from Colorado State University, an M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and a Colorado Professional Teacher License. With my educational background and experience, teaching College Preparatory Reading as a part of a variety of FastStart Learning Communities was a perfect fit. I have taught the REA090 class with college level history, psychology, and communications classes. The creativity, contextualization, and sense of community that I am able to achieve with my students and my co-instructors in these classes continue to be a transformative experience.

Joanna Liebelt, FastStart Program Advisor

Joanna has served as an Educational Case Manager for the FastStart program at the Community College of Denver for the past two years. She also serves as adjunct faculty for CCD teaching college success and study skills classes as well as Interpersonal Communication for the FastStart program. Joanna received her Master’s degree from the University of Northern Colorado in Communication and has taught communication courses at various colleges and universities in Oregon, Arizona and Colorado. Her teaching philosophy focuses on collaborative and contextualized learning, which works well in the FastStart structure. She is a member of the National Academic Advising Association and serves as a volunteer for Rocky Mountain B.E.S.T., a non-profit organization that encourages middle and high school students to participate in annual robotics competitions to promote their involvement in engineering, science and technology. When not serving students, Joanna enjoys mountain biking, rock climbing and hiking with her 2 dogs in the beautiful Rocky Mountains.
FastStart Program Advisor
Rosalinda Martinez
Developmental English Faculty

Rosalinda Martinez graduated with a BS in Mathematics and a MS in Teaching, Learning and Leadership with an emphasis in Mathematics from Oklahoma State University in 2006. After graduating, I began my career as middle school mathematics teacher. Through teaching children in the public school setting, I found that the students learn best when the material is relatable and when they are able to collaborate. When I began teaching mathematics at the Community College of Denver in 2010, I was able to apply my philosophy to the adult learners in my classroom within the FastStart Learning Community Program. The English/Mathematics Learning Community allowed me to partner with an English Instructor in a co-taught classroom. Within in this small classroom setting, I found that students were able to excel.

John O’Leary
Developmental English Faculty

I have been teaching at CCD since 2000 and I taught in the CCD fast-start program from 2010-2012. My philosophy of teaching has always been focused on integrating creativity and critical-thinking, as opposed to separating them. I see my role as a facilitator of a “learning process,” as opposed to the stereotypical “subject-area-expert.” With this model in mind, the “lecture only” approach is replaced by a more complex conversation, and the level of student engagement rises as a result. By focusing on the class as a community, (and on each student as a member of that community), the experience of learning is fundamentally transformed. Students assume a membership and an ownership of the class that opens up doorways of learning that would otherwise be missed. In three years of teaching LIT 115 in conjunction with ENG 090 via Fast-Start, I feel validated by this student-centered approach, which reflects the natural, social aspect of learning, as well as the interactive world we live in.

Rosalinda Martinez
FastStart Program Advisor

Rosalinda Martinez is a talented rising leader in helping non-traditional students gain success in college and in their personal endeavors. Rosalinda graduated from the University of Denver with a degree in Sociology. Rosalinda began her career as a Program Advisor for a grant funded program at the Community College of Denver (CCD) in August of 2005. The purpose of this program is to accelerate students through the developmental education course sequence and provide the academic and life support that non-traditional students require in order to be successful in college. Rosalinda was a key leader in institutionalizing and scaling up the program and continues to support the program to keep intact and strengthen the elements which make it successful. Rosalinda is also an adjunct instructor for Advanced Academic Achievement classes at CCD. Rosalinda’s passion is to help her students and community achieve success in their lives through the power of education.

Kelli Glorso
Developmental English Faculty

Kelli Glorso taught for CCD from the Spring of 2010 to the Fall of 2012. With her diverse skill set from her interest in science to English, she taught a variety of classes at CCD in Developmental English, and in the FastStart Program, co-teaching developmental English with Communication Skills for three semesters.

Michael Zadro
Developmental English Faculty

I was born in the United Kingdom, but I grew up and went to school in Africa, only returning to graduate high school and go to University. After graduating with a BS in engineering and a MS in Math education, I then moved on to skippering yachts around the Caribbean and Mediterranean. But as the long sunny days of summer turned into slightly shorter sunny days of winter, I felt a need to go back to school, and so returned to the UK to study computers and Information Technology. After teaching Math and Computers for a while back home, I moved to Denver to teach Math at FRCC, AIMS community college and finally CCD. Teaching in the FastStart accelerated program allows me to introduce contextualized lessons to group activities which promotes critical thinking and engagement, and fosters a community of learners. Within this, I combine two classes and can adapt the syllabus accordingly without having students repeat material they would have had in two separate classes. Students can progress at a faster pace than they would have done in a regular class.

Lisa Silverstein
FastStart Coordinator and Reading/English Instructor

Lisa’s experiential education background blends well with the FastStart philosophy: facilitation of learning, activity based coursework, promoting a strong sense of community in the classroom, and interdependence. Community among faculty is important to her and is strong in the FastStart program. Lisa likes to have fun in and out of the classroom, active learning is present in all aspects of her professional experience. She has a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado at Denver and has taught all levels of English, Reading and Academic Achievement courses as well as a variety of team taught learning communities, in addition to her role as FastStart Coordinator.
Sean McCandless
Political Science Faculty

Sean McCandless is earning PhD in Public Affairs and has degrees in Political Science, History, and Psychology. He is starting his fourth year as a Political Science instructor at CCD and has been part of the FastStart Program, enthusiastically team teaching Political Science courses with developmental English for 2 years.

Karen Jaramillo
Reading Faculty

Karen M. Jaramillo joined the CCD Reading Department in 2011. She taught in various departments such as English, English as a Second Language, Advanced Academic Achievement and the FastStart program. She has served on the Developmental Education Committee and was appointed as Co-Chairperson of CCD’s Diversity and Inclusion Council. Mrs. Jaramillo earned a Masters in Education in Curriculum Design and Leadership from Colorado Christian University. Her educational philosophy is rooted in the quote. “Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity.” (Cesar E. Chavez). Karen believes students must discover relevance and a connection to both one another and the curriculum within a safe learning community in order to reach their desired potential. She currently teaches several sections of both developmental and transfer level Reading courses, which includes Exploring Diversity Issues and Fast Start’s Integrated Reading and Writing course.
Enrollment in FastStart classes begins with a mandatory meeting between the student and the FastStart case manager. The goal of the meeting is to help the student decide if the FastStart program is right for them. The informal interview gives the case manager an opportunity to hear how students view themselves as students, where they would like to be, and what is required for them to reach their goals. Topics explored in the initial meeting include the pace and time of FastStart classes, how an accelerated course would fit with a student’s life schedule, and how FastStart classes would potentially match the student’s learning style and initial ability level. With the encouragement of the case manager, students make an informed decision about what is best for them; to take a FastStart course or not.

In our experience, we have found that the students who are the best fit for FastStart classes are those who are motivated, who understand what it takes to be a college student or are willing to learn, and who will seek or accept the help when it is offered.

Student Motivation

The main way we assess student motivation is by looking at the educational goals that a student has set for themselves, “why they are in college,” regardless of how realistic or unrealistic these goals might be. Having a goal tells us that students have thought through the end result of being in college and what a college degree can do for them (help them feed their family, advance in their workplace, get a job, be an example for their kids). They have a realistic understanding of how the piece of paper they receive upon graduation will positively affect their life; and are therefore more willing to “stick with it.” Even though the specifics of the process may not be clear to them, they are motivated to keep going because they are focused on the end result.

On the other hand, if a student’s reason for being in college is a result of someone else’s decision or other motives (TANF, parents, free money, etc.) they often lack the personal drive or an understanding of how an education can truly benefit them. This is what we often find when we see students not working up to their potential. In our experience, until a student can see how a college education will benefit them and until they have a clear idea of how to get there, the student will continue to struggle.

Career exploration becomes a critical piece to helping students formulate their educational goals. A few ways the FastStart case managers encourage this exploration is to: have students visit the college’s Career Development Center, enroll in a one credit college experience class that has a built in career exploration piece, link students to other case managers in specific degree areas, explore possible interests by suggesting students take a variety of different classes, refer students to the transfer center to discover possibilities of transferring to a four year school, and continue to have conversations about what they are learning, what they enjoy, and what they want to do in the future.

Once the decision has been made, students attend a FastStart orientation the week before classes begin. This is when the expectations of FastStart students are presented and discussed, and questions answered. Orientation is structured as an interactive session, setting the tone for the style of cooperative learning that the students will meet in their FastStart classes. By attending orientation, students demonstrate their willingness to put in the additional effort that is required to be successful in the program. When a student shows up on a Saturday morning for orientation we see it as a sign that they are willing to give a little extra, which is exactly what will be asked of them in their FastStart classes.

Faculty Engagement

FastStart instructors, like FastStart students, are highly motivated. FastStart instructors teach traditional classes as well, but what we see in FastStart classes is a greater engagement with students. FastStart instructors are teachers, but also partners and guides in the students’ educational journey. They demonstrate this commitment by attending FastStart meetings, sharing their successes with the FastStart team (case managers, other instructors, and coordinator), and brainstorming with each other and the team about how to increase their effectiveness. Team meetings provide a forum for faculty to swap ideas about how to improve their teaching and how to create stronger connections with students.

Part of the strength of these connections is the longer length of the FastStart class period (6 hrs a week versus 3 hrs a week for regular classes,) giving instructors more time to get to know the students and to address specific skill deficiencies. As case managers, we see the additional time as contributing to the instructors’ awareness of the non-academic obstacles that students face, in addition to giving instructors more time to help students overcome roadblocks and/or direct students to campus resources that can assist them.

One of the ways FastStart instructors partner with FastStart case managers is by participating in the student early alert system. The use of the early alert system, referred to as STEAR (Student Early Alert and Retention), provides a structure for instructors to communicate student progress and/or concerns to educational case managers. In Spring 2011, all developmental education instructors were required to use the STEAR to communicate student issues and concerns. Although the use of the system was a formal requirement, data shows that it was not used by the majority of instructors. However, FastStart instructors showed 100% participation. One reason for this may be that FastStart instructors have the confidence that the issues that are flagged in STEAR will be addressed by the case managers who serve the program (a ratio of 200 new students per semester to one case manager).

Team Connection

For students, connection and engagement begins during the initial student/case manager interview. This is when the case manager learns about the many “life hats” that students wear, marking the beginning of a relationship of trust that extends throughout the student’s career. The strength of these relationships make it easier for students to speak truthfully about what’s going on in their lives if and when performance or attendance issues come to the attention of the case managers. These relationships are further strengthened during the FastStart orientation, where the FastStart case managers, coordinator, instructors, and students participate in team building activities.

For instructors, many of whom are part-time faculty, FastStart is an opportunity to be part of a team that includes case managers, other full and part-time faculty and the program coordinator. Through this connection, FastStart instructors become more aware of the student services side of the college (resources on campus, student requirements, and deadlines) and are in a better position to encourage students to seek these services when needed. The connection and
A common theme in student feedback is how much their FastStart classes feel like a family, how comfortable they are with students in their FastStart classes, and how they came to know everyone not only by name, but as friends. Students in a FastStart class will call one another when they aren’t in class, will text each other when they are late, asking where they are, and will make sure if someone does miss class that they have the homework assignment and are caught up by the next class. In many ways they are each other’s reason for being in class. This FastStart “family” support is sometimes the only support students have in their pursuit of a college education. Sometimes, the hardest transition for a student from FastStart to traditional classes is the loss of that sense of community. Even then, the connection that FastStart students create with each other in that first semester is so strong that it continues outside of class and even after the FastStart class ends. Students continue to take classes together in successive semesters and can be seen around campus with each other, and in groups. FastStart students tell us that the support structure gives them the confidence to continue with their education. We see this confidence in the program again and again, as students return to the FastStart case manager for registration and guidance semester after semester, often with another FastStart student or in a group of students, and passing on the FastStart connection by referring friends and relatives to the program.

Being successful in FastStart gives students a huge boost of confidence, helping them persist in college and grow as individuals. A key to that success is the connection and engagement that runs through the program, from instructors to case managers, supporting the student’s commitment to school and bringing about the realization that “yes”, FastStart students are truly “college material.”
Learning Communities as Professional Development

By Peter Lindstrom, Developmental English and Sean McCandless, Political Science

Note: To demonstrate the interactive nature of our team-teaching style, we have structured this reflection as a dialogue. Pete’s comments are in regular font; Sean’s are italicized.

Learning communities developed from course combinations involving two instructors create two types of communal interaction. The first and most readily apparent community is student learners who benefit from increased instructor interaction and a more structured facilitation of peer groups. The instructors themselves make up the second community, and although this interaction is not as facilitated and/or structured, its impact cannot be overstated. When one instructor is teaching, the second can act as a teaching assistant, bringing up concepts (or different views of concepts) that the first did not cover or, more importantly, to act as a facilitator to show how concepts from one class crossover to the other. This can be as simple as APA (“Hey Pete, we need to mention “organizational authors”—I will cover that) to advanced writing practice (“Well, to add to Sean’s point about creating a political philosophy thesis, I think a compare and contrast will be the most effective here. Let’s do one now”). This type of learning and growth, which is reported by most instructors participating in team teaching environments, is much more powerful and engaging than any other form of professional development. There may be examples when two instructors do not connect in a meaningful way, diminishing any potential for professional growth, but in the case explored here, the experience continues to reverberate through our pedagogies within the class and beyond.

Sean and I teach a learning community that combines POS105 and ENG090. The class meets two days a week for two hours and forty-five minutes—basically, two typical seventy-five-minute class periods meeting back to back with a fifteen minute break. (during which students often take the opportunity to sound out both instructors for advice). The students receive a total of six credit hours, three of which are transfer-level credits in Political Science, the other three being the prerequisite developmental English credits. Our normal class period is evenly divided, respecting what would be the standard class time for each course. Occasionally, one class will “borrow” time from the other, or trade complete days, allowing for more extensive, in-depth classroom activities. This can occur when the English side needs more time for in-class workshops in which both instructors facilitate or it can occur when watching a documentary on economic development that requires extensive discussion. Regardless, both of us are present for the majority of the class time, finding that each course benefits from the presence of a second instructor for a variety of reasons (as seen above).

The main benefit Sean and I have realized, though, is the way the team teaching environment has affected and transformed our individual pedagogies. Having roots in developmental education, my techniques tended to be on the innovative, learner-centered side of the spectrum, whereas mine, by necessity of the major, have to combine both standard classroom lecture paradigms and more audio-visual elements. My basic goal was to get students writing and any assignment or activity that encouraged students to put pen to paper was on the table. This is my goal as well, but I have to be sure that the students have a basic competency in numerous large, difficult political science concepts before I can successfully let them out of the class. During our first semester, I quickly discovered that these assignments had to be tailored not only to the content of the transfer-level course, but also to the various forms of written assessment used by Sean, and I found it necessary to make sure students see the connections from my class to Pete’s class, often spending several minutes accentuating a crossover. Even though the students appreciated my instructional techniques, they voiced a desire for the assignments to have more direct application to the Political Science course, and this extensive crossover has seen both of us have growing competency in the other’s field. This has led me to understand that any innovative pedagogy must not only engage students as learners, but also prepare students for more traditional pedagogies that they are likely to find as they progress in their college career. I do not mean to imply that Sean uses an old stodgy traditional lecture technique—I frequently use videos, in-class activities, mock elections, and stylized debates, which is definitely not in the traditional paradigm—my point here is that higher-level courses seem to be more restricted by content than are developmental courses.

In our learning community, Sean and I have to address this disconnect head on, and resolving this issue has been the most instructive to both of us. And the students end up being better writers overall, setting the stage for the more advanced political science courses.

ENG 090 Basic Composition (3 credit hours)
Emphasizes critical thinking as students explore writing for specific purposes and audiences. Enables the student to develop skills required for college-level writing, review grammar, and review paragraph structure while focusing on essay development.
Prerequisite: ENG 060 or ESL 053 with a grade of C or better, or English assessment score of 70-94. Corequisite: AAA 109

POS 111 American Government (3 credit hours)
Includes the background of the U.S. Constitution, the philosophy of American government, general principles of the Constitution, federalism, and civil liberties. Examines public opinion and citizen participation, political parties, interest groups, and the electoral process, and the structure and functions of the national government. This course is one of the Statewide Guaranteed Transfer courses. GT-SS1
Prerequisites: ENG 121 with a grade of C or better, or instructor consent.

1 Introduction to Political Systems – a smorgasbord class in which students learn the concepts essential to a basic understanding of political science.
2 Basic Composition – the highest level developmental English course preparing students for freshman composition.

3 This may be due to the fact that even though basic study skills are part of the course competencies of developmental courses, they generally are not part of the course competencies of transfer-level courses. But just as I recognize that innovative pedagogies ought to prepare students for traditional ones, traditional pedagogies ought to address the recursive nature of basic study skills development. This spirit of “meeting each other halfway” is one that Sean and I continue to develop and explore with every class.
Who’s Baking the Pie?
The answer: no one and everyone. In essence, everyone participating in the FastStart program at the Community College of Denver has had their hands in baking the sweet pizza pie known as the learning community class of ENG090/LIT115. From the collaborative meetings to the feedback sessions with faculty and students, everyone’s energy has contributed ingredients to the class. What began as a journey to discover the right recipe in the Spring of 2010, has now etched itself in a memory filled journey full of surprises and growth for both faculty and students.

The Laughter of Creativity
When John and I first met to plan, we shrugged our shoulders and laughed. A nervous laughter, but brimming with possibility. In fact, recently John quipped, “At the start of this process, during one of our planning sessions, I said I’d like to lecture for about 20 minutes and you said: “What do you think about 10?” And we laughed again, and since then we committed to being in each other’s class for 99% of the time, asking each other to jump into any discussion, anytime. After four semesters of teaching this class together, we even sense when it’s time for the other to add to the conversation in class. This partnership has been so beneficial for the both of us as we’ve cut off our egos, compromised for the greater good, and learned from each other. Even when a lesson has tasted terrible, we’ve laughed in the midst of our own faces and the students’ faces as often we solicit student feedback on assignments and in-class activities. We return to our “situation room” with this lesson and revise the recipe. Always, we find a way to make those pies taste a little better, and that has been a huge part of this journey. With creativity as our tool, we challenge each other to see who will risk the first bite.

To Tweak or Not to Tweak, That is the Question
The answer is: tweak! After working closely with Brian since 2010, I’ve learned one thing: a handout, a mini-lecture, group work, and a host of other pedagogical elements can always be improved upon with imagination and humor. For one hour to two hours each week, we sit down, crack an apple in half, and ask: what is the funniest and most imaginative way to teach what we are trying to teach? In these discussions, the emphasis is on risk-taking, rather than playing it safe. By doing this, we model the very risk-taking that we ask our students to do every single day. What do you think an “at-risk” student feels when they enter a new environment with 25 strangers, one where they have to learn new and often difficult skills? In a word: fear. By prioritizing imagination and humor in our planning, our handouts, our outside readings, our class activities, and every other aspect of the lesson plan we can think of, Brian and I are planning with a purpose in mind. When students see these elements of humor and imagination in so many different guises, they start to feel energized, excited, even hopeful, and they also start to feel comfortable as risk-takers themselves. And it is from this perspective that all true learning begins.

The Double-Koosh Ball
The risk begins with community building in the classroom. To learn names, we’ve often done a game where students add a verb with same letter as their first name. The second semester we attempted the activity, we tweaked it. John and I and the students broke into two circles, blew up the classroom, and began. Who goes first? We do. I threw out Ballin’ Brian. But oh no! Another tweak was added! This time, an action when someone said his/her name. So, I did.

Work Hard, Laugh Loud: An Approach to Learning Community Classes
By John O’Leary, Developmental English and Brian Dickson, Developmental English Chair

ENG 090 Basic Composition (3 credit hours)
Emphasizes critical thinking as students explore writing for specific purposes and audiences. Enables the student to develop skills required for college-level writing, review grammar, and review paragraph structure while focusing on essay development.
Prerequisite: ENG 060 or ESL 053 with a grade of C or better, or English assessment score of 70-94. Corequisite: AAA 109

LIT 115 Introduction to Literature I (3 credit hours)
Introduces students to fiction, poetry and drama. Emphasizes active and responsive reading. This course is one of the Statewide Guaranteed Transfer courses. GT-AH2
Prerequisite: ENG 090 with a grade of C or better, or English assessment score of 95 or better, or equivalent ACT/SAT scores.

Ballin’ Brian while miming dribbling a basketball between my legs. Of course, this was silly, but students participated with little reservation. By the end of the activity, we used large “koosh balls” where students tossed them to each other in rapid fire rounds as they attempted to remember everyone’s name. Having both instructors participate aids in creating smaller groups, lessens the intimidation factor, and models the learning process even in a simple context of learning names. Students intuitively learn how language can be fun when they realize they are verbalizing alliteration! Lastly (although the students don’t know it yet), they are gearing their bodies for the theater section of the class. It cannot be emphasized enough that we laugh, learn, and remain open to possibilities, as both students and instructors see that they are truly in a class together.

Who is That Quiet Student in the Corner Who Hasn’t Spoken in Five Weeks?
Her first name is Michele. For the first 4-5 weeks of class, she said only a few words. She attended class regularly, but she seemed to make little or no connections to her peers. I approached Brian and expressed some concerns. He affirmed what I was seeing and we talked about possible strategies. I should mention that yet another advantage of team-teaching is the ability to brainstorm about retention strategies. My idea was to encourage Michele to opt for the 10-minute performance of an original play for the Theatre section, rather than write a 5-8 page analysis paper of A Doll’s House, by Ibsen. (Students are offered both options and asked to choose one.) Michele initially preferred the “analysis paper,” but I disagreed. I thought the benefits of the “original play project” might help her grow more as a learner. I ran this by Brian and, as ever, he offered solid advice: Talk to her, offer up your ideas, and see what she thinks. I did so. After 3-4 emails, and 2-3 lengthy conversations, Michele made her choice: she would try the play option. She eventually co-wrote and co-performed an original play, one where she portrayed a scientist, a character who watered her lawn using the latest, scientific advancements. Her neighbors (portrayed by 2 other bi-lingual students,) preferred the “old ways” of watering. Conflicts ensued, and the audience saw an intelligent play about culture clash, ecology, and tolerance. A year later, Michele stopped by my office and told me how she had received an “A” in “COM 115,” and how much the theatre experience had helped her to succeed in her Speech class. In regards to the play that she wrote and performed, Michele said: “It was something I didn’t know I could do.” By challenging students with creative projects that are also intellectually rigorous, there’s a much higher chance that they will commit to keep coming to the class, commit to keep completing
There was something about these comments that both surprised and
very social for me, very social. I think you missed that.” And I did
guys interact. You’d be surprised how much I learn. This class is
seen teachers behave like that. It’s actually really interesting, they
cracking jokes, figuring things out as you go along. I have never
you and Brian interact. You two are like brothers up there, arguing,
“Oh, I get that every day.” How so, I asked? She said: “By watching
about learning styles and the social aspect of learning. She told me:
concerned that she was not really engaged with the class. I talked
time, and in what they tell Brian and I directly every day.
comments in the evaluations, in their generally higher rates of at
pizza pie” on a daily basis, and these benefits are reflected in their
learning community class consistently get the benefit of the “whole
class, and because developmental learners are often quite divergent
in their skill levels and in their preparedness, this scenario is not
unusual. Because the 2 of us can divide the class into 2 distinct
but purposeful sections, both the prepared students and our “lesser
prepared” students are both moving forward. Rather than coming at
this situation from a paternalistic stance, a team of creative teachers
can agree to creative solutions that reflect the fact that 2 professors
are in the room. This is not to imply that it is impossible for the
solo teacher to be innovative, but rather that it is often a more fluid
and organic process in the learning community class, simply due
to the fact that 2 teachers equates to a 100% increase in staff. In a
sense, the menu of solutions doubles in ways that are obvious, and
sometimes not so obvious. I would argue that the students in the
learning community class consistently get the benefit of the “whole
pizza pie” on a daily basis, and these benefits are reflected in their
comments in the evaluations, in their generally higher rates of at
endance, and in what they tell Brian and I directly every day.

Learning from Erika
So much occurs in a class and a great deal of it is unspoken. Erika
attended our learning community class regularly, but was extremely-
ly reticent. She kept to herself; she liked boxing; she abhorred
public speaking in any form. Clearly, the class was an alien and
unfriendly environment, but despite this obvious fact, she kept
attending. When the theatre section came up, I challenged Erika to
do the “original play option,” in order to stretch her skills. Unlike
Michele, she refused. I decided not to push the issue. At about the
12th week of class, I met with her in my office as part of a confer-
ce. I told that she was doing solid “B” work, but that I was a little
concerned that she was not really engaged with the class. I talked
about learning styles and the social aspect of learning. She told me:
“Oh, I get that every day.” How so, I asked? She said: “By watching
you and Brian interact. You two are like brothers up there, arguing,
cracking jokes, figuring things out as you go along. I have never
seen teachers behave like that. It’s actually really interesting, they
way you both play off each other. I learn a lot just watching you
guys interact. You’d be surprised how much I learn. This class is
very social for me, very social. I think you missed that.” And I did
miss that!

Learning is a Living Thing
Picture a pizza pie with six delicious slices and we can begin to
understand the difference between “solo” teaching (one Professor
teaching a 15-week class), and team teaching, (2 Professors teaching
2 classes that are linked across the curriculum to some extent). The
six slices represent: interactive learning, side-coaching within group
work, teaching to multiple intelligences, group work/group work
presentations, teaching and encourage creativity, and independent
work. As a solo teacher, I may, on any given day, try to bring six
slices of the pizza to class, and before the semester is over, I will cer-
tainly get to all six at the highest possible level I can, but it not
nearly as easy to bring all six pieces of the pie to my “solo” class,
especially with half the staff!

But as a learning community instructor, I can mostly get to all six
on any given day, simply by asking my partner and colleague to
bring three slices and then I will bring the other three myself. If, for
example, we are work-shopping a major essay, and seven students
come to class who have not even begun the project, rather than
“fail” them for the day for being unprepared, we can divide the
class into 2 groups, and I can work with these seven, while Brian
works with those who came prepared. They will likely lose some
points for being unprepared, but because there are 2 teachers in the
class, and because developmental learners are often quite divergent
in their skill levels and in their preparedness, this scenario is not
unusual. Because the 2 of us can divide the class into two distinct
but purposeful sections, both the prepared students and our “lesser
prepared” students are both moving forward. Rather than coming at
this situation from a paternalistic stance, a team of creative teachers
can agree to creative solutions that reflect the fact that 2 professors
are in the room. This is not to imply that it is impossible for the
solo teacher to be innovative, but rather that it is often a more fluid
and organic process in the learning community class, simply due
to the fact that 2 teachers equates to a 100% increase in staff. In a
sense, the menu of solutions doubles in ways that are obvious, and
sometimes not so obvious. I would argue that the students in the
learning community class consistently get the benefit of the “whole
pizza pie” on a daily basis, and these benefits are reflected in their
comments in the evaluations, in their generally higher rates of at
endance, and in what they tell Brian and I directly every day.

Wait! Wait! John and Erika do not get to gobble the whole pie
here. Erika arrived early to class on most days, and one day we
chatted in the hallway about her statements to John. In her sense of
humor we had come to know her in face to face moments she said,
“What comments?” with eye brows raised. She laughed immediate-
ly. Said she would really miss the class because of the interaction.
There are several unspoken learning outcomes occurring here. We
all share in the life of learning, relish the small risks that reward in
life, and learn to be open as beings showing the light and laughter
inside us.
I’ve taught ESL classes for 11 years now. Prior to that, I taught standard freshman composition classes and developmental English composition classes. In the last 3–4 years I’ve joined the new FastStart program in which students can complete two levels of a subject, e.g. developmental English and college-level English composition, in one semester. During my early years teaching ESL composition, I had always wondered how students fared when they went from ESL to college English classes in which they were engaged with native English speakers and writers, so that is one reason why I teach FastStart now.

In writing up how English language learners (ELLs) fare in FastStart, I began by asking my current students (12) in the combination of an ESL composition to a regular developmental English composition class what they felt and thought. The prompt was: How has a FastStart class worked for you as an English language learner? Their responses can be categorized into three aspects:

I. Subject/English use
In this first aspect, some of the comments were: “FastStart helps me to focus on my thoughts at writing class . . . to spend more time with my teacher and classmates.” “I do more reading and writing . . . and researching in the computer.” “I learned many types of essays.” “FastStart really helped because I got to express my thoughts. I get to give my opinion whenever we go to another unit. We always talked about it and listen to other students to know each other better. And for me it’s a good way to practice my English and my speech, be more comfortable to talk in class.” “FastStart helped me with my English learning and with my cultural learning, too, because during the class we talk and discuss about different subjects.”

What I see in these comments is that FastStart, through its longer class time (2-1/2 hours per class, two times a week), allows more ELL students to participate verbally as well as in writing, giving them time to think and then formulate their responses in the target language, English. And as they practice in English more, they gain confidence in their use of English. This confidence, I hope, will carry over into the core composition and literature classes as well as their classes for their majors.

II. Sense of community
As noted in one comment above, ELL FastStart students had much to learn about the different cultures represented in our class, and they appreciated the time they had to get to know the teacher and their fellow students, as one student said. Another mentioned that s/he felt students and the teacher were “more friendly in class.” We used a writing text that asked us to share about people who’ve influenced us, about our own personalities, and about moral issues. The prior semester’s class had no problems opening up, but this term’s group was reticent at first. Nonetheless, they grew in closeness as we shared our different cultures’ takes on topics. Again, I think the longer class-time together aids this.

III. The “farness” of the class
This topic got the most comments. For instance, about 4 students wrote positively on the theme of “getting to the next level more quickly.” Two of them said they liked the fact that within the semester we were also moving more quickly through the essays; as one student wrote, “I think the FastStart class is more helpful than regular class. Sometimes we need to do an essay for many weeks in the regular class, but I can learn more information in FastStart class . . . in two weeks, and save more time.” Another wrote, “You don’t even realize you are passing two classes in one semester – it’s just like one class.” Yet another student was realistic when s/he wrote, “FastStart classes are so good because you can gain time but you have to think if you are going to have time to do homework.”

As an instructor, I may fret that ELLs will be slower and struggle at completing homework than their native-English speaking peers, but I’ve not found that to always be true. It seems in reality that some ELLs will not assume that homework will be easy and so they will get to it sooner. (In previous terms, I’ve taught FastStart classes for developmental English students with both native English speakers and ESL in the same class.)

Also, the struggle that I anticipated they would have with perhaps not enough time to work on English sentence structure and grammar in class did not materialize with this current group. I’ve found that their English editing habits and skills (going to the ESL and Writing labs, working with native English speakers) have already been developed in prior classes, which speaks well for our ESL program. In addition, the study group we held after class was another place to work on the language, although again, this group wanted to work on ideas much more.

In general, I hear from ELL students that they are anxious to get to their core college courses, so FastStart appeals to them. Fortunately, our program interviews these students to determine if they’ve shown the ability and commitment in past courses that will predict if they’ll succeed in FastStart. There are students who need the extra time in ESL classes before they can get to their majors. But for those who have shown they can complete the homework, think and express on a fairly high level, and have the commitment, FastStart for ELLs seems to work. As one student put it: “I think FastStart makes college goals easier. I hope in the future CCD will have more FastStart courses.”

A final note that I found myself emailing to a colleague outside of the FastStart program after we had chatted regarding FastStart’s efficacy for ESL students was this:

“ . . . perhaps FastStart isn’t for everyone, like you and I said. But I’d like to distinguish FastStart from a regular Learning Community – by that I mean a combined class that isn’t speeded up, like yours or Bobbie and Sharon’s. I think learning in community is one key to better student learning, the
other being time spent on a subject. Or should I say that time spent on a subject combined with time spent with others on that subject is a great combo.”

Course Goals and Competencies:
- Composition
- Recognize writing as a process – writing/rewriting drafts and revising/editing for content
- Write about a variety of situations using various patterns
- Learn basic essay organization
  - Improve sentence and paragraph structure
  - Improve grammar, punctuation and usage
  - Know the difference between summaries and reactions (responses)
- Participate in writing workshops with instructor and classmates
- Utilize college support systems (ESL lab, Writing Center, tutors, etc)
- Accomplish personal writing goal
Project Purpose and Overview
I teach Reading 060/090 and English 090 in the FastStart program at Community College of Denver in Denver, Colorado, as well as traditional Reading and English courses. Although this FastStart course combination now serves both native speakers and English as a Second Language (ESL) students, it was originally developed for ESL exiters who would otherwise be placed in two developmental reading courses and one developmental writing course. My current class is a mix of these two groups, ESL exiters and native speaking students. A recent project that I assigned to my class was designed to engage these two demographically different groups of students in a collaborative project. I wanted to offer an opportunity for both my native speakers and ESL students to learn more about one another on a deeper level, thus creating a safe learning community where students are comfortable speaking in class. This project was also assigned to my English 090 class, which meets in the traditional class schedule. In comparing the process, attitudes, and engagement of the assignment from both classes I found the outcomes to be quite different.

Background
Students in both classes were required to write a comparison and contrast essay for the English component. They were instructed to conduct an interview with someone who was born and grew up in a country other than their own. The name of the assignment was called Cross-Cultural Interview and Analysis. Assignment requirements included the following components: (1) interview a fellow student, staff, or faculty member on campus, (2) develop at least ten questions for the interview, related to Cultural Background, Education, Leisure Activities, and Familial Traditions, (3) respond to the same questions, (4) identify both similarities and differences in three key areas, and (5) create a wordless poster depicting the differences and/or similarities discovered. Students were encouraged to choose a person to interview; however, some students were intentionally paired together.

Findings
The results showed that FastStart students were excited to learn more about their classmates, whereas, students in the traditional class resisted the assignment. Although there were students from other countries in the traditional class, they showed discomfort in finding someone to interview and seemed less open to learning more about their peers.

The two FastStart students who were intentionally paired together demonstrated the most successful findings. Student “A”, the most vocal native speaker and Student “B”, the least vocal ESL student were paired together as an example of two very different student personalities and levels of confidence. Student A normally sat near the front of the classroom, while Student B would sit in the back row of the classroom and never speak in class. By the end of the assignment, Student B had moved from the back to the front of the class, was asking several questions, and was more confident in expressing his views in class. Often times Student A would encourage Student B to participate in group discussions and activities, which seemed to motivate Student B to be more engaged in class.

In the beginning of the semester Student B shared with the instructor that his English skills were very poor and that he lacked the confidence to speak in class. The native speaker now, at the end of the semester, encourages his partner to share in class and his partner seems confident in doing so. Other student pairs have continued building friendships during and after the project was completed. In fact, the native speaking students are planning a field trip to take the foreign students in class to a Denver park which offers free ski and snowboarding lessons.

Conclusion
FastStart students who participated in a contextualized lesson with opportunities for interaction between peers showed stronger results in developing trusting peer relationships than traditional students who were given the same assignment. In our opinion, the dynamic that contributed to this result was the creation of a safe learning environment where students could spend more time together over the course of a semester. We postulate that students who are enrolled in more traditional classroom formats are less able to connect and develop deeper friendships due to the time constraints in the class.
One of the main goals of learning communities is to increase student success by facilitating the establishment of student peer groups. Since studies indicate a strong correlation between such peer groups and student retention/completion, we can expect that helping students form these peer groups would increase success in the FastStart program, as well as in concurrent and future classes. Our developmental English/math learning community provides a perfect example of such peer groups not only forming, but working as a positive and integral element of the class. Furthermore, the structure of the class has created a dynamic environment where specific peer groups support students having difficulties in the class as well as acknowledge students with advanced abilities. Basically, the structure of the class has made it easier for students to make friends, and those friendships seem to be sowing the seeds of college success.

Our particular FastStart learning community combines ENG090 with an accelerated MAT060/090 course. The class meets three days a week – on Monday, Wednesday, Friday – for two hours and forty-five minutes per class period. There are no prescribed times for the English and math portions of the class, but the expectation is that the English portion of the class will use about a third of the time while the math portion will use the other two thirds. This happens variously throughout the week, meaning that one day might be all math or English, another might be a combination, and still other days will have distinct math and English segments. Students receive ten credit hours for the course, so for a good portion of them, this class is the only class they take during the semester. Both of us try to be present for all class periods, participating in each other’s lectures and helping facilitate classroom activities.

What we have observed this semester, the first semester we have taught the course together, is the formation of the extraordinarily strong and positive peer groups mentioned above. The students not only take it upon themselves to help each other during structured classroom activities – the more advanced students explaining concepts to their classmates in small groups, struggling students actually getting up to move about the room on their search for help from advanced students – but these same peer groups can be seen outside of class in the Academic Support Center, working on assignments for both classes and seeking help, as study groups, from tutors. These peer groups have become so effective, in fact, that most classroom activities can be tossed back onto the students with little need for continued guidance and instruction from the instructors. It should be noted that both of us employ experiential learning strategies in our lesson plans, so students are constantly working in pairs or small groups. Thus, a sort of positive feedback loop has been created where the strong peer groups start to demand experiential activities to understand the concepts, which in turn creates more opportunity to strengthen the student-to-student bonds, further encouraging the confidence to voice what type of instruction actually helps them all learn.

One of the main causes of this effective and proactive learning community is the amount of time these students spend together in class. They are in class close to three hours, three times a week. And for most, this is their only college class since it represents three courses combined into one class. Structurally, this makes the class itself the whole of their college experience for an entire semester. Although there are divergent concepts within the class, the students perceive it as a singular class. This made them much more inclined to not only form peer groups, but to seek help from that same peer group as they struggle with divergent concepts. Some students are stronger in one subject over the other, meaning that they might be sought out for advice in English but will be seeking out advice when it come to math. This allows the students to share strengths and weaknesses, whereas a single-subject class will have advanced students always being advanced and struggling students always struggling.

A structural component of the class that seems to positively impact the communal feel is the acceleration of the math portion. Forcing students to move through the concepts quickly keeps the high-performing students engaged while encouraging ones needing help to seek out such assistance sooner than in a normal 15-week course. It is as if the sink-or-swim moment in the class comes earlier, allowing more opportunity for struggling students to get caught up. It also seems to highlight the recursive nature of much of the instruction, with most of the concepts building on each other throughout the semester, making the lesson plans part review, part application, and part new instruction. Even though this may be similar to traditionally paced 15-week courses, accelerating the course enables greater differentiation of instruction by allowing the instructor to focus primarily on the new concepts and the peer groups to focus on review and application.

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2 Basic Composition – the highest level developmental English course preparing students for freshman composition.
3 Pre-Algebra and Introductory Algebra
Basically, the structure of the learning communities in the FastStart programs helps students make friends. By combining two courses into one class with two instructors, class time is increased, which increases peer group formation and interaction among the students. Also, acceleration compliments this peer group formation by increasing differentiation of instruction and encouraging student mentors in the class. All in all, accelerated learning communities provide a structure that clearly promotes positive student peer groups.
Combining a developmental class with a college level class through a FastStart Learning Community gives context and immediate relevance to the developmental reading curriculum and to the main goal of developmental education: preparing students for college level work. In a FastStart Learning Community, strategies are not being taught for future use but are being used as they are learned for success in a college level class. I have seen the power of the Learning Community model in my College Preparatory Reading class paired with General Psychology.

As the reading instructor, I made the decision to use the psychology text as my only required text. The students, of course, loved the idea of not having to buy another book and were thrilled to hear that my reading assignments would dovetail with their assignments in Psychology. Along with assignments from the text, I give students regular supplemental readings ranging from relevant articles from Psychology Today to peer reviewed academic journal articles to excerpts from books. Though the amount of reading is pared down compared to what it would be if the reading portion of the class had its own book, the reality becomes a great example of less is more. Each of the strategies taught in REA090 are applied to the assigned readings for PSY101 and students use these strategies as they were meant to be used. Here are three examples:

- For the psychology chapter on consciousness, students read an article about artificial intelligence.
- For the chapter on emotion, students read a National Geographic article entitled “Love” that told an interesting story integrated with scientific facts about the research on love.
- For the chapter on Nature vs. Nurture students read Tiger Mom, and article about a Chinese-American mother’s rather controversial parenting techniques.

The supplemental readings give learning community students an opportunity to practice reading strategies with different levels of reading and augment the ideas from the text with current examples of the psychology principles in action.

Along with the advantage of connecting the REA090 readings with psychology, the learning community model implements developmental skills with college level work in real time. For example, one of the key strategies in REA090 is the use of the SQ3R method (Survey, Question, Read, Rehearse, Review) for previewing, reading and reviewing material for long-term learning and short-term success on exams. Students are taught and begin using this method with chapter one of the text and many students have reported anecdotally that this technique helps them immeasurably in their studies overall. Another skill from the REA090 curriculum is finding the main idea or central point and supporting details of a passage or paragraph. I use this strategy explicitly with one of the psychology chapters to help students with the initial reading of the chapter and with outlining and note-taking skills.

While the reading materials and application of strategies to the psychology curriculum make the learning community concept a powerful one for students on a daily basis, the Reading for Research Project that the psychology instructor and I designed integrates the goals and content of both classes in a comprehensive project. In this project the students work in collaborative groups on a topic related to stress, the subject of the final chapter of the course. From a reading instructor perspective, the main goal is to help them understand the process of research and be able to read high level academic journal articles with the goal of pulling out and making sense of the details and examples needed for their research project. As they work on the project throughout the semester, students use strategies like skimming and scanning, note-taking and outlining, and understanding vocabulary in context to put together their product. The project is required and graded by both instructors. However, we each graded different pieces. This semester I required students to find 4 appropriate peer reviewed academic journal articles (12 per group), summarize the hypothesis, methodology, and conclusions, and determine if the article is appropriate for inclusion in their final product. The psychology instructor required students to put the information together on a poster that explains their own suggested psychology study using chosen journal articles as examples. The project is an excellent culmination of content, reading skills, and analytical thinking for both classes and for the concept of the learning community of the highest level developmental reading class and the introductory psychology class.

As Maryellen Weimer put it in her book Learner-Centered Teaching, "One of the findings emerging out of extensive experience with remedial course work is that students do not develop basic learning skills or more sophisticated ones nearly as well absent a disciplinary context. The best place to teach learning skills is not the remedial course but the regular course. This is not a surprising conclusion. There is not much motivation to think critically when there is no legitimate content to think about. There is not much motivation to work on skills that prepare for future encounters with content. We teach learning skills more effectively when that instruction occurs in the context of a course with disciplinary content." A FastStart Learning Community gives students the motivation and the opportunity to accelerate their learning by taking a college level class while working on their developmental requirements. The deeper advantage is that by applying the skills and strategies of the reading class as they learn them, students learn the developmental skills in a context that is interesting, cohesive, and relevant to their goals as learners and degree seekers.

### The Power of Two: Learning Communities Motivate and Facilitate Developmental Course Work

By Joan Harris, Developmental Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>REA 090 College Preparatory Reading (3 credit hours)</td>
<td>Enables the student to apply strategies for improving comprehension, developing vocabulary, and increasing rate for reading college textbooks. Prerequisite: REA 060 with a grade of “C” or better, or Reading assessment score of 62-79.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSY 101 General Psychology I (3 credit hours)</td>
<td>Focuses on the scientific study of behavior including motivation, emotion, physiological psychology, stress and coping, research methods, consciousness, sensation, perception, learning and memory. This course is one of the Statewide Guaranteed Transfer courses GT-SS3. Prerequisite: ENG 090 with a grade of “C” or better, or English assessment score of 95 or better, or equivalent ACT/SAT scores.</td>
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All disciplines present unique teaching challenges, especially when teaching introductory courses. Political science embodies these challenges. Like most colleges offering a political science degree, the Community College of Denver offers “Introduction to Political Science,” a smorgasbord class that premiers the most important political science concepts, from sovereignty and legitimacy to economic development and theories of international relations. It is precisely this breadth of coverage that makes this a challenging (and rewarding) class to teach. The FastStart program offers two unique structural and functional benefits that assist greatly when teaching this course, namely an emphasis upon combining hermeneutics and dramaturgy (and the associated tools) as well as modeling the nature of democratic politics.

For decades after the founding of political science as a distinct discipline, the standard introductory course in American universities was typically American Government; however, many scholars saw the need for an introductory, comprehensive course that served to introduce the most important concepts in the lexicon, and “Introduction to Political Science” was the result (Lustick, 1997). The most lauded teaching approach is to begin with the “Big Theorists” (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli), then through comparative politics, economics, and international relations. The unique problems presented in this format is that the pace and content of the lectures (including the intellectual skills required to keep up) are vastly different, and hermeneutical as well as dramaturgical skills are necessary for both. FastStart offers unique opportunities to help address this decades-old issue. First, the inclusion of two teachers during both lecture periods can highlight, through dramaturgical strategies, different hermeneutical approaches (Freie, 1997). Second, both teachers can serve to reinforce important concepts (and strategies to understand those concepts), providing a double dosage of the course content; even further, the teachers themselves can dramatically model the concepts and debate first hand. Third, the time periods again allow the students to address the material in different milieus, again allowing for synergy between the required hermeneutics and dramaturgy.

In our current pairing, students study the concepts and their application on the POS 105 side, yet their first “go around” in writing and applying the concepts occurs on the ENG 090 side. Here, Pete (English) is able to provide instruction about how to approach the concepts whereas Sean (political science) is able to provide instruction on the interpretation of the approaches. Thus, FastStart, better than most preceding models, can more effectively and harmoniously combine not only understanding the concepts but acquiring and practicing the skills required to understand the concepts. That it also allows the teachers to model these approaches actively and entertainingly with one another in front of the class has been nothing but a bonus.  

1 Methods of critical interpretation, especially of texts.
2 Theatrical/dramatized representation of a concept; thus, the terms in tandem mean “dramatically representing a critical interpretation of an important concept.”
3 Any type of political organization or political unit.
4 In other words, a highly in-depth debate between the two professors OR modeling certain political behaviors under investigation, which can then allow the students to understand the concepts much better than using other strategies. A good portion of political science research on this subject indicates that students must engage the material using as many senses as possible. It means one thing to understand something like mixed-member proportionality on paper; it is quite another thing when the professors run an election using this system for the students.

A good understanding of concepts in political science often exists in tandem with the ability to understand them hands on, especially in role playing (Kaarbo & Lantis, 1997). However, this requires giving significant power to students, and it treats them as a democratic community of learners, a conceptualization that reinforces as well as instructs their identity as citizens and ties participation in the classroom to political participation (Mattern, 1997). FastStart has been able to incorporate this tactic much better than have many previous scholastic formats. First of all, the conduct of a FastStart classroom requires a great amount of give and take between the two instructors. We have chosen to model this approach in front of our classroom by negotiating and augmenting our strategies to certain situations. Often when presenting material, one instructor will ask the other for his opinion and assessment. At times, this has resulted in one instructor briefly taking over the other’s lecture to highlight an additional point, or add a qualification, or even to model a different strategy. Rather than a chaotic process, it is an instructional and democratic approach in which students learn about an aspect of the material from a different perspective while observing a model for democratic interaction. Further, it provides instruction and learning for the instructors themselves. Students have often indicated that one of their favorite aspects of our courses is the interaction between the instructors.

Second, this increased time as a community of learners allows for extensive democratic modeling experiments. For instance, we often dedicate both class periods to coordinated class debates, or model elections under different systems (e.g., running an election in a mixed member proportional system), to even social contract experiments in which students have to negotiate amongst themselves and with us about how to form their own societies à la social contract theory. Through this extended interaction, students have uniformly demonstrated an increased competency in understanding and discussing the concepts highlighted, especially vis-à-vis the interconnections between theory and praxis and their relations to communication in writing. Finally, to syncopate assignments and lessons between the two classes, we often have allowed students to negotiate the nature and content of overlapping assignments in which the first draft of an ENG 090 paper will become the basis for the final draft of a POS 105 paper (with the understanding that an assessment of the academic legitimacy and approval of those plans lies solely with the instructor). We present decisions as those that would affect both classes, and students have reported feeling empowered and that this enhanced ownership of their education makes them feel more invested in their education as a whole.
“Introduction to Political Science” is a hallmark class of modern political science, and FastStart offers numerous ways (including many not detailed above) allowing for enhanced presentation of the material. The FastStart program itself is a macrocosm of the strategies identified here. It is a program that emphasizes the democratic and communal nature of the learning process; it empowers students and allows them more investment in their education; it allows students to see linkages between fields that they otherwise might not be able to see; and it presents interactions between two professional instructors working in tandem rather than separately or at cross purposes. All “Introduction to Political Science” classes should be so fortunate as to benefit in such ways.

References


Compression
Reading and writing are integrated in the FastStart@CCD program by compressing three or more levels of reading and English in one learning community so that students can complete their developmental sequence of courses at an accelerated pace if they are two or more levels below college. The integrated reading and English courses we offer currently are: ENG/REA 060 paired with ENG/REA 090, REA 060/090 paired with ENG 090, ENG 060/090 paired with REA 090 and ENG 090/121 paired with REA 090. All of these courses are either 9 or 12 credits. So, the question most often asked is, “how does an instructor get through 9-12 credits of material in a class that only meets 6 hours per week?”

Natural Integration using Career Exploration
Reading and writing are naturally integrated and linked. Thematic units and lessons contextualize the material and concepts are examined together, instead of as separate reading and writing topics. For example, FastStart REA/ENG courses all have a career exploration theme. In this unit, students write an I-Search paper, and in the process they skim and scan online resources that they will use not only for the research in their essay, but in their future for further career investigation as they get closer to obtaining (or learning how to obtain) their degrees. Students also have to conduct an interview with someone in the field they are researching, which requires savvy note taking techniques along with inferential and evaluative questioning based on their own reading and research. Students are reading and writing about their career interests, building their professional vocabulary and learning how to read for research and resources in preparation for an in depth “research” paper. Instructors teaching this unit collaborate with AAA 101 instructors (a 1-credit, first year experience orientation course) who also teach a career exploration component in their class. In the AAA 101 course students learn about career resources on campus so that in the REA/ENG class, they seek out these resources to use for their I-Search paper.

Inferential and Contextualized Ideas- an Organic Process
In my ENG 060/090, REA 090 course we discussed inferencing and differentiating fact and opinion (reading concepts.) Students read and analyzed editorials of their choice, dissecting audience, purpose, patterns and tones (reading and writing concepts.) This activity led into a business letter writing assignment, a contextualized assignment, as it is a commonly used skill. Students used the reading concepts to write an opinion of their own that had them focus on awareness of audience and tone while actively thinking about concise detail. This business letter was about a product, service or idea of their choice to either share their praises or complaints. Students needed to keep a professional tone in their details, which had them thinking about the pattern of organization based on their topic and purpose. In this unit, our notes and ideas came together and as a class the chart below was created organically, by the students, out of what they learned:

What was so impressive about this chart is that the students made all of the connections together as a class. It was a truly organic and unique experience that came from a facilitated learning community of integration and contextualization centered around students’ natural critical thinking abilities that isn’t teacher led, but rather community led.
Student Feedback
In feedback sessions, students often say, “this class isn’t as hard as I thought it was going to be,” or “there was less work than I anticipated.” Students enter the course knowing it is 9-12 credits (based on the compressed course they take) done in roughly half the time of a traditional 15-week course, and they are surprised that it doesn’t feel like they are doing 9-12 credits of work. By integrating and contextualizing meaningful material, students naturally make the reading/ writing connections and learn to use them interchangeably, as shown above in the chart that they created and their in-depth career research. When students make connections and can explain these connections by creating flow charts like the one above, they remember and internalize the concepts learned and then apply them to other areas outside of class. Integrated reading and writing as an accelerated format can be done successfully!
Instructors who have not taught FastStart often ask how two semesters of developmental math can be taught successfully in one semester? This semester I taught MAT 090/099. While teaching this course I realized how much math content is repeated during an accelerated semester. Teaching a topic in MAT090, only to have it repeated a few weeks later in MAT099 seemed redundant. Having students continue to work on the same topic without jumping back and forth and having different topics thrown at them in-between seemed more logical.

For example, look at the following two questions:

“How many liters of a 30% alcohol solution must be mixed with 90 liters of a 90% solution to get a 70% solution?”

“Ron and Kathy are ticket-sellers at their class play. Ron sells student tickets for $4 each and Kathy sells adult tickets for $6.50 each. If their total for 34 tickets was $171.00, how many tickets did Ron sell?”

Both questions are taught in MAT090 and MAT099. By teaching both courses in one semester, I was able to teach the students all methods of solving these problems (methods taken from MAT090 and MAT099) early on in MAT090, during the same 3 hour period. These application problems are sometimes a struggle for MAT090 students. Reading and translating to a mathematical formula takes repetition. I had the students tackle similar problems again and again, but I would let them try ideas from both sections for them to use in solving these problems. Then they got to decide which method worked for them. As an instructor, my knowledge of math content up to College Algebra helped, as I knew different ways the students could use to solve these types of questions. This is key to success in teaching all accelerated math classes. Knowing the content of the classes in sequence (MAT030 through MAT121) helps merge the material from each class into a single topic taught over one or two periods, not weeks apart.

Take another example. The graph on the left is from MAT090, the one on the right from MAT099. The only transition, left to right, is the extra line on the second graph.

Reflections on a FastStart Accelerated Developmental Math Syllabus

By Jason Burke, Developmental Math

MAT 090 Introductory Algebra (4 credit hours)
Includes first-degree equations, inequalities, formulas, polynomials, factoring polynomials, solving quadratic equations by factoring, coordinate geometry, graphing linear equations and applications. Algebraic fractions and systems of linear equations may be included.
Prerequisite: MAT 060 with a C or better or Elementary Algebra Assessment Score of 45-60. Corequisite: AAA 109

MAT 099 Intermediate Algebra (4 credit hours)
Emphasizes problem solving with further study of equations, slope, inequalities, systems of equations, polynomials, quadratic equations, rational expressions, radical expressions, graphing and applications. A graphing calculator or equivalent software may be utilized. For students with an Accuplacer score of 61-84.
Prerequisite: Grade of C or better in MAT 090 or Math assessment score of 61 (EA) or better.

As we teach the syllabus as written, there is no transition from left to right. Once I showed the students how to graph a straight line, it was only logical to make them graph two lines and explore the new topic of solving equations by graphing. The 3 hour period given was used in this way – graphing and then solving equations by graphing (incorporating all the elements from both 090 and 099). Again, this was successful as the students continued working on graphing without having different topics thrown at them in-between. The lesson was not split into two sections 2 months apart, but taught as one MAT090 section.

In all accelerated Math classes we have the extended class period to merge similar elements of both sections and make them work as a logical continuation of the material. Writing the syllabus to reflect this could be discussed amongst FastStart math instructors.
When people hear about the ENG090/MAT060/090 course combination, the typical response is, “what do those two classes have in common?” And as first-time instructors for this learning community, we asked ourselves that same question since the only common element between the two seems to be that they both enhance critical thinking skills. In fact, English and math seem to have so little in common that most colleges and universities dramatically separate the two, meaning that once students choose to focus on one, continued work with the other subject is minimized. It is not uncommon, then, for one to obtain an advanced degree in English and be functionally illiterate with regard to the nomenclature used for mathematical concepts, and vice versa. This ignorance of each other’s field of study was certainly the condition we found ourselves in when we began developing the lesson plans for this particular learning community.

In some way, the lack of expertise in each other’s field was advantageous because we were able to bridge the divide between student and teacher by the very fact that both of us found ourselves being active students during certain parts of one another’s lesson plans. This changing role within the class helped model student behavior and made students feel more comfortable and less self-conscious about taking risks in the class. The class truly became a learning community where students and teachers alike would ask questions about difficult concepts and propose different explanations about how to arrive at the correct answer. But we also discovered a wealth of ways in which these two subjects are actually much more complimentary than either of us would have believed.

The initial plan for the class included two collaborative projects that formally structured the cross-pollination of both content areas. The first was a group project borrowed from previous instructors1 and involved solving level-appropriate math problems in order to create a structure of a certain shape and size. The English portion of the project involved the students not only representing the most important concepts of both courses on these final structures, but also writing an individual reflection essay about one’s progress in the class. In the second collaborative project, students created business plans developed from the Small Business Administration website and presented them competitively to guest faculty, who judged each proposal based on certain criteria created by the students themselves. Both of these projects asked the students to creatively combine the content and were designed to assess how the overall critical thinking skills were enhanced by the learning community. As referred to above, concrete connections within both courses became apparent as well.

The first direct link we discovered is how rules of grammar often follow the same logic as mathematical rules. For instance, the order of operations in algebra dictates how one finds the answer to an equation where quantities are added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided. Knowing what to do first is essential because $2 + 2 	imes 10$ can lead to different answers depending on what part of the equation is solved first. This is similar to the grammatical development of complex sentences where modifiers, phrases, and clauses are added to a simple subject-verb relationship (independent clause). The concepts are almost mirror images of each other as one dictates the sequence followed to get to the final mathematical answer and the other starts with a core sentence and dictates the sequence with which it can be modified. Another example is how translating word problems into equations depends on an ability to not only break a sentence down into its component parts, but to also understand the relationship between each of these component parts. This correlation was so striking that it actually led to a combined lesson plan where basic sentence structure was paired with a word-problem activity2. Other connections between mathematical and grammatical rules would come up throughout the semester – some explored as they come up, others noted to be used in future lesson plans – and students were encouraged to come up with their own connections that they then wrote up and shared with the class.

The final example of how the course content merged between ENG and MAT moves beyond the similar rules for algebraic equations and grammar to a more conceptual similarity in how equations and essays are simplified. One of the skills needed to simplify equations is factorization. This is basically utilizing the understanding of the order of operations to take a common factor out of an equation for simplification; for example, $x^2 + 5x + 6 = (x + 3)(x + 2)$. The function of this task is to create common elements in a larger equation that can be combined or canceled out. This factorization process functions in the solving of an equation in the same way that a thesis statement functions in an essay, especially when students do what many beginning writers do when they write their way to a thesis statement – meaning that they explore a topic in a relatively coherent manner and find themselves concluding with a statement that is related to everything previously stated in the essay. So just as they have to organize the equation through factorization, they must also organize their essay by introducing the thesis at the beginning.

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1 Sirat Al Salim and Lisa Silverstein, who pioneered this course combination for CCD’s FastStart program.

2 A sequence of activities progressed from ENG [independent clauses] to MAT [operative words in a sentence] to ENG [dependent clauses] to MAT [groupings on either side of the “equals” sign] to ENG [conjunctions] to MAT [relationships between groupings – add, subtract, etc.].
These are but a few of the examples that we have discovered and that have also been incorporated into our lesson plans. The remarkable thing that both of us realized is that drawing the connection between the disparate subjects allows students two distinct avenues to approach an understanding in both areas of study. People are often categorized as being right-brained or left-brained, with one side associated with math and the other, English. Combining the two subjects into one class allows for all students, regardless of predilection, to discover ways to approach both subjects through their natural strengths.
Instructors practice and model collegiality and collaboration in the FastStart program model of learning communities. The FastStart Learning Community includes the cohort of students as well as FastStart instructors. Because we want students to work together collaboratively and take informed risks to grow as learners, we as instructors must do the same, a sometimes daunting but definitely worthwhile task when we see the power of an integrated course with the benefit of two instructors.

When I attended my first FastStart Instructor meeting, I got to hear colleagues’ experiences about the process of integrating content and co-teaching with a colleague. While the prospect of co-teaching may be daunting to many college instructors, I got to hear my colleagues speak about the overwhelmingly positive process of learning alongside the students as they worked to implement collaborative projects together, and how their teaching improved as a result.

Part of the FastStart model is observing colleagues and entering into conversations about the nature of team teaching and how to best build community within the class, as well as integrate content and ensure rigorous, college-level content. My experience of observing two instructors team-teach a Basic Composition and Introduction to Literature course (ENG 090/LIT 115) was extremely rewarding. I noted that students got to see how well the two instructors work together. This team teaching approach also provided valuable instruction to students on how to present their own original, student-created play to the class (the assessment in this particular instance). I was amazed at how powerful and dynamic the classroom atmosphere can be with two instructors team teaching.

What I like about the FastStart program is that we can show students powerful cross-curricular, multidisciplinary connections between and among academic subjects. This way, developmental students actively make connections between the organization of an essay and that of a speech. For example, in the ENG 090/COM 115 FastStart Learning community, students will learn writing and speaking strategies, such as how one builds credibility throughout a speech as well as in an academic paper. They also learn how to respond skillfully to one’s audience, whether addressing a group in person or in writing. These are only two examples of the connections and extensions students will experience as a result of participating in the Basic Composition/Public Speaking FastStart Learning Community course.

As I stated previously, students taking a FastStart Learning Community course will get more out of the course than if they took the two courses in isolation. Our ENG 090/COM 115 students have produced more prolific and deeper work than what I have seen in my regular ENG 090 courses. Because of our integrated assignments and approach, students were able to explore their chosen topics with greater depth, since they were producing a paper for ENG 090 and a speech for COM 115 from the same research. My students have benefited greatly from their work on audience analysis and how to tailor their delivery to their audience because the topic was explored in both classes. The reinforcement of these key concepts shows in our students’ writing and speaking skills. It has been a challenge, learning to team teach, but the results are certainly worth it.

Students in the FastStart Learning Community also seem to have much more of a “cohort group” feel, and they have bonded in a positive way. Many students, in a reflective/formative assessment, have commented on how much more comfortable they feel in this class, as compared to their regular classes, and their high-level discussions are an extension of that. I have also noticed a much higher retention rate—there are many more students in my ENG 090/COM 115 course at semester’s end than there are in my regular ENG 090 classes. Lastly, I have heard directly from colleagues in our Writing Center that my ENG 090/COM 115 students seem to have an excellent grasp of citing sources in MLA format.

Even though it is a fair amount of work to integrate content and team-teach with a colleague, the results are clearly worth it. I am surprised at how powerful this model is, and I look forward to continuing to develop and refine my approach next semester and beyond. Since collaboration and functioning as part of a team are important skills for 21st Century learners, we are modeling that approach for our students. Students do get more from an engaged, hands-on approach that is the bedrock of the FastStart Learning Community, and they experience first-hand the powerful multidisciplinary connections between academic subjects. I myself have grown as a learner through the risk-taking and collaboration in creating a team-taught ENG 090/COM 115 course, and I have seen similar exponential growth in our students.

Collaboration and Collegiality in the FastStart Model
By Kelli Glorso, Developmental English

| ENG 090 Basic Composition (3 credit hours) |
| Emphasizes critical thinking as students explore writing for specific purposes and audiences. Enables the student to develop skills required for college-level writing, review grammar, and review paragraph structure while focusing on essay development. |
| Prerequisite: ENG 060 or ESL 053 with a grade of C or better, or English assessment score of 70-94. Corequisite: AAA 109 |

| COM 115 Public Speaking (3 credit hours) |
| Combines the basic theories of communication with public speech performance skills. Emphasis is on speech preparation, organization, support, audience analysis, and delivery. |
| Prerequisite: ENG 090 with a grade of C or better, or English assessment score of 95 or better, or equivalent ACT/SAT scores |

Prerequisite: ENG 090 with a grade of C or better, or English assessment score of 70-94. Corequisite: AAA 109

Students must do the same, a sometimes daunting but definitely worthwhile task when we see the power of an integrated course with the benefit of two instructors.
Team Teaching Models/Contextualization
• Various ways to construct the class
• Infused curriculum with separate grades for each class
• smooth integrated transitions and stronger critical thinking skills
• Cuts off the ego, exercise in humility
• All about the students, less about you [the instructor]
• Discover each other’s teaching styles and philosophies
• Rely on each other for ideas, immediate feedback, continuous “tweaking”
• Extra “external” support is there with two teachers at the same time. Extra comfort for students
• Elements of successful communication that is shared by different disciplines.

Flexibility
• Longer class discussions, students more comfortable asking questions and talking in front of the group.
• More discussion time in math [than in trad. Math course]
• Unconventional classes can work in unconventional spaces [STARZ]

Community
• More receptive to building community than in reg. classes
• Mindset changes in these unconventional classes. Changes the culture
• Higher grades on MAT 090 final, due to strong community (meeting outside of class)
• High energy level, engaged and more willing to share
• Vulnerability by all (instructors and students) deeper learning as a result
• Group support provides help and encouragement
• Students attend class more often, more invested

Study Groups
• Awarding extra credit for attending (and writing up study group work)
• Students attending study groups outside of class gained confidence and excitement about material.
• Greater external support
• Study groups help instructors address student “problems”
• Students more driven, drive for their own inquiry carries, makes for a productive study group hour
• Multiple classes meeting during one study group hour
• Work and strengthen learning styles by working with various students outside of class

Rigor/motivation
• Ask more questions
• Get “down to business” more quickly
• Contextualizing curriculum increases reasoning, analysis and critical thinking- meaningful
• FastStart MAT 060/090 students generally grasp MAT 090 concepts more quickly
• FS students rise to level of class. Seeing motivated and rigorous student habits, pushes others.
• Better assignment completion rates, more willing to do assignments
• More engaged with their own processes

Student to Student/Student and Faculty Collaboration
• Gave permission for students to question me (based on learning styles lesson)
• Students ask for help when they need it. Learn to become more independent learners
• How fast does the moment occur when students take own learning reigns? In FS? In reg. class?
• Less pressure to things yourself

Registration Process/ Choosing another Faststart course/Retention
• FS students bring friends/family to register for FS classes
• Returning and referral of students speaks to prog set up and excellent, innovative teaching
• Co-registering one-on-one w/ case manager builds comfort into experience
• Students who meet in class go to case managers together to register
• Student who may not take the same classes but take classes at the same scheduled time so they can meet in-between class to study together.
• Using student ambassadors for feedback about classes, loads and instructors.