

A 'Third Space' Approach to Secondary/Postsecondary Curriculum Co-development

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Abstract

The College Credit Plus (Ohio's dual-credit program) Curriculum Office at Columbus State Community College has offered professional development opportunities to teachers throughout the tenure of a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from 2016 to 2021 (the College and Career Readiness Expansion project). As Columbus State's College Credit Plus program continued to grow into the largest in Ohio, our offerings became more frequent and more varied for assorted audiences of teachers. CCP Curriculum learned how best to serve CCP teachers, as well as how to draw from and share their expertise across the K-12 and higher education worlds. Our Third Space English programming is a prime example of how CCP Curriculum wants to approach collaboration on behalf of students.

I stand by the table laden with snacks a few teachers had brought for the meeting, observing the pairs and trios of high school and college English teachers deep in conversation. These educators care deeply about student success and recognize the multitude of inequities some students face in accessing higher education. We are establishing the building blocks of a pre-college composition course that could prepare students for a College Credit Plus (or dual-credit) composition class, serving as a gateway to further college courses.

Over the next year, we would define this course, called Third Space English, by its culturally relevant pedagogy focused on uplifting students' voices and giving students opportunities to read and write about social justice. Two Central Ohio districts would commit to piloting this course. I didn't yet know that as I surveyed the teachers working together. But I did know that I was witnessing something powerful, as K-12 and postsecondary teachers engaged together on behalf of today's high school students and tomorrow's college students.

1.0 Context

By the very nature of the concept of dual enrollment, College Credit Plus (CCP) teachers are a bit betwixt and between. Columbus State Community College instructors and credentialed high school instructors must balance the intricacies of teaching college classes to high school students, often in high school settings. Columbus State instructors may have experience teaching a particular course, but little understanding of how high schools and their students operate. Conversely, high school instructors often know their students well but may not have clear strategies for distinguishing their CCP classes from standard high school classes.

From the start of the i3 grant in 2016, Columbus State’s College Credit Plus Office knew that we wanted to support CCP teachers.

We began this work in Autumn 2016 by offering a series of workshops, called This is College Teaching, aimed at the Columbus State faculty teaching courses in area high schools. Drawing from experts across the Columbus Campus, we provided workshops about topics such as understanding the adolescent mind, using cognitive-social psychology strategies to increase students’ motivation and engagement, and supporting first-generation pre-college students. We also hosted workshops where CCP teachers and other Columbus State faculty shared specific ideas and approaches that have led to student success in their classrooms. Our goal for these workshops and all professional development offerings has always been to provide teachers with information and tools readily applicable to their classrooms and students’ needs. And at the beginning of Autumn and Spring semesters, we welcomed Columbus State instructors new to CCP with a kickoff event.

Most Columbus State CCP faculty are adjuncts. I had been an adjunct English instructor at Columbus State for nearly 10 years, serving as a CCP adjunct instructor with two local districts. Not only had I enjoyed sharing college classes with high school students, I had also met the supportive staff in the College Credit Plus Curriculum office during the 2015-16 school year. I had come to strongly believe in the mission of access that dual enrollment promotes. So, when the then-executive director of CCP approached me about creating professional development opportunities for CCP teachers, I was excited.

I also understood the needs of CCP adjunct faculty. While I found teaching English in local high schools rewarding, I sometimes felt isolated. I didn’t see my colleagues on campus very often, and I did not always have the opportunity to get to know teachers at the high schools. To combat this potential isolation for CCP adjuncts, we promoted the workshops as “professional development and *collegial support* for Columbus State CCP faculty.” At each workshop, before the official programming began, we provided food (through funds outside of the grant) and time for instructors to chat about teaching and life. Because many CCP adjuncts discover great satisfaction working with high school students, and because many high schools enjoy having the same Columbus State adjunct faculty semester after semester, we saw an opportunity to create a core group of teachers who could support one another.

Importantly, through provision from Columbus State and the i3 grant, we have compensated adjuncts for attending these workshops. Paying these instructors – and going beyond grant support to provide them with a snack and coffee – communicates to them that we appreciate the value of their time.

2.0 College Credit Plus, An Ever-Changing Landscape

In the early days of College Credit Plus and the College and Career Readiness Expansion project, we concentrated professional development efforts on a Spring Semester all-day event for high school teachers on the Columbus Campus. These annual spring events primarily served as training for high school teachers new to teaching CCP classes the upcoming autumn.

Columbus State had new high school partners join the program with several new teachers in the first years after the state of Ohio legislated College Credit Plus. The spring professional development event allowed us to gather

new teachers to gain general information about teaching CCP courses and connect with their discipline-specific departments. As Columbus State's CCP program reached a near saturation point in Central Ohio, with most districts participating in some way, the need for such an all-day event lessened. Though new teachers joined the program every year, the volume decreased. We began to turn our attention toward not simply orienting and training new teachers but also improving and enriching their CCP experiences.

We began inviting high school teachers to the This is College Teaching workshops and learned an invaluable lesson about serving these instructors: High school teachers have busy, inflexible, all-day schedules that make it very difficult for them to attend a workshop at the Columbus Campus at, say, 4 p.m. To make it to such a workshop, a teacher first has to finish their last period class, attend to any administrative or planning duties, and meet with students and/or other faculty. Then they have to drive to campus, find a place to park, locate the building and room, and try to have some mental energy left to appreciate and enjoy the workshop. Many teachers could not attend due to extra-curricular school responsibilities or family commitments.

By this time, the College Credit Plus Office had split into two functions – CCP Services, which includes student support, enrollment, and advising, and CCP Curriculum, which focuses on teaching and learning, including professional development for teachers. I knew that CCP Curriculum should do a better job on behalf of CCP high school teachers, but there was no single, ready answer. In Autumn 2019, Lauren Jones, senior director of CCP Curriculum, and I visited Hamilton Township High School, one of the schools participating in the CCRE project.

“[Columbus State] goes above and beyond with engaging volunteer adjuncts and creating partnerships with local high schools. A few years ago, I became a volunteer adjunct with CSCC for my high school. I was immediately enveloped with professional development opportunities to help me feel comfortable with the curriculum, teaching high school students on a college level, and learning the technology used on campus. Fast forward a few years, and I cannot believe how our partnership has grown. Columbus State is always including our school in developing new programs to help our high school students gain success in the college classroom. This year, we were included in a partnership with Columbus State and a local business to help some of our graduating seniors gain access to college, an internship, tuition assistance, and transportation to help take away the barriers that can hold back some students.”

–Jaime Elledge, Columbus City Schools CCP Instructor in Principles of Business, Personal Finance, Marketing and 21st Century Skills

Their teachers had attended little professional development on Columbus State's campus due to distance and a lack of available substitutes. We shared some CCP basics and answered their questions and concerns about CCP and the upcoming school year. The teachers seemed appreciative, and we were finally able to put faces to names we had emailed or seen on lists. We connected.

The CCP Curriculum Office realized that offering any professional development to high school districts and their teachers was predicated on connecting with these teachers directly.

3.0 Communicating Collaboratively and a Significant Pivot

One way of connecting with high school and college CCP teachers seemed simple: communicate more regularly. Until this point, we had usually sent teachers a few emails a semester, messages filled with instructions and information about the academic calendar, usually about what to do at the beginning and the end of the semester. The existing communications emphasized deadlines and rules. We wanted to move toward communicating *with* teachers instead of *at* them.

We decided to start sending information in smaller, frankly more attractive, bites. We began emailing teachers brief, informative cards called Tuesday's Tidbits. These include information about programs for teachers or students, reminders about dates, and sometimes just a note of appreciation. In receiving positive feedback from teachers about Tuesday's Tidbits, we learned that connection mattered and that minor contact points added up.

Connecting with teachers became more challenging and perhaps even more important in March 2020 when COVID-19 forced Columbus State and all local K-12 districts to move schooling online. CCP Curriculum started sending daily Tidbits to encourage teachers and let them know that even as we were dispersed in our homes across the region, we were still there to support them. Like so many around the country and the world, we found ourselves having to pivot to all-online programming for teachers.

By the start of Autumn 2020, CCP Curriculum began sending out weekly online support emails that offered teachers concrete, evidence-based ideas and materials for their online or hybrid classrooms. Our goal was never to add to teachers' workloads but to help them streamline and focus on what absolutely needed to be done. We also had the opportunity to offer some discipline-specific workshops for English, history, and math in the virtual environment. Columbus State CCP faculty leads in these departments took the initiative to provide practical, timely ideas to bolster these CCP instructors. Our online Supporting College Teaching series saw an increase in attendance over previous similar in-person workshops. Throughout Spring 2021, CCP high school and Columbus State instructors learned about student engagement, self-care, active and collaborative learning, and cultural humility in the class environment.

Naturally, the emphasis of College Credit Plus Curriculum's professional development has been on CCP teachers. We always say that the focus is teachers on *behalf* of students. We use research-backed evidence to recommend practices that benefit students.

"Actively participating in the Third Space Collaboration has been a rather enlightening and inspiring experience. In-depth discussions with high school colleagues of English about teaching philosophies, required curriculum, as well as our students' experiences has helped me better understand the journey they have been on and how that can inform the path they will continue to take in college. Establishing foundational needs together for the present and future success of our students has inspired new ways of teaching and learning that can hopefully create smoother transitions for students often left behind or stumbling along the way."

–Rachel Brooks-Pannell, Columbus State Associate Professor of English

4.0 Third Space English

It appears that addressing entrenched community problems, such as those about college access, requires new approaches to collaboration that involve creating cultural norms that are neither K-12 nor higher education, but something else – some sort of third perspective and organizational culture that is created by multiple stakeholders in multiple and disparate contexts. (Núñez & Oliva, 2009, p. 333)

The idea for Third Space English (TSE) began in Autumn 2018 in what Columbus State’s CCP Curriculum Office called English Readiness Conversations with faculty from Columbus State and area high schools coming together to discuss how to help students achieve success in college composition.

Third Space English

Follow the development of the Third Space English course through this timeline. It is important to note that high school teachers earn stipends, and college faculty receive release time for the collaborative Third Space work.

March 2019

Faculty from area high schools and Columbus State met to determine student learning outcomes for a Third Space English class.

- Writing with complexity and creativity
- Understanding research, argument, and rhetoric
- Using a process approach with writing
- Synthesizing information from multiple sources (both personal and research sources)
- Improving sentence- and paragraph-level writing

Summer 2019

During a series of two-hour meetings, high school and college teachers collaborated in pairs/trios on one of the student learning outcomes. They developed shared definitions

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CCP Curriculum understands that dual-enrollment classes are one element of the College’s relationship with K-12 schools. The larger conversation must always be about how we best serve students, whether in high school or college.

The group’s ultimate goal has been to develop a one-semester pre-composition English course that helps high school students transition to college writing, specifically to Composition One. The class is designed to serve students in CCRE schools. The ideas behind TSE are rooted in two broad bases of research: collaborative work between K-12 and higher education faculty and equity pedagogy (sometimes referred to as culturally relevant or culturally responsive pedagogy).

Third Space English arose from an awareness that severe problems regarding students’ preparedness for postsecondary education cannot be solved independently by either high school or college educators. For issues this entrenched, we need to innovate through collaboration, not isolation. High school and postsecondary teacher partnerships have proven successful in developing transition courses like Third Space English (Creech & Clouse, 2013; Valdez & Marshall, 2013). We think of this collaboration as occurring in a *third space* that is *neither and both* high school and college.

Students’ preparedness is often viewed through a lens that emphasizes their supposed deficits instead of their possibilities. In short, much blame is cast on everyone involved, particularly the students themselves. For students, we hope that this *third space* serves to narrow the distance to their postsecondary options. We want to offer a space where students can gain skills, confidence, and an understanding of how their voices can change the world.

For two consecutive summers, Columbus State facilitated conversations between high school and college English instructors. They began by developing a common language about the skills deficits that prevent students from being “college ready” in English and then created lesson plans related to those specific skills. As the work evolved, those discrete lesson plans transformed into a semester-long curriculum containing content that makes sense for a high school audience and scaffolds the skills students need to succeed in a college-level writing course.

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and illustrative assignments that high school teachers could use right away. Each workgroup had at least one teacher from K-12 and one from postsecondary education. We wanted every part of the course to have the fingerprints of both high school and college faculty.

Summer 2020

Using Linda Christensen's book *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Words* as a primary source, high school and college English teachers developed a curriculum based on culturally relevant pedagogy. Again, during a series of meetings, pairs/trios worked together on sections of the curriculum to create four central units for a semester-long Third Space English course.

Autumn 2020-Spring 2020

Teachers took the summer curriculum work to create daily lessons for each unit.

Summer 2021

CCP Curriculum, Columbus State English faculty, and teachers from two high schools piloting Third Space English in Autumn 2021 collaborated in a series of six professional learning meetings. We discussed how to use the curriculum to meet the needs of these teachers' students. We also established how to create a Third Space English classroom environment that encourages students' growth as writers and as young people with agency in an ever-changing world.

The high school and college teachers co-creating the course infused the curriculum with culturally responsive teaching strategies. The faculty who worked on this know that socioeconomic and educational inequities have systematically disenfranchised many students deemed "at-risk" academically. This course seeks to give students a platform to share their voices, express lessons from their own experiences, and read and respond to diverse works.

In terms of equity pedagogy, Third Space collaborators recognize that we can offer a curriculum that promotes excellent writing and reading. But if that curriculum fails to resonate with students, it will not meet their many vital needs. Ladson-Billings (2014) notes: "A literature that tells us what works for middle class, advantaged students typically fails to reveal the social and cultural advantages that make their success possible. But success among 'the least of these' tells us more about what pedagogical choices can support success" (p. 76). Delivering curriculum through an equity pedagogy connects what students learn in school to their lived experiences outside of school, teaching them "*through* their own cultural filters" (Gay, 2013, p. 50), rather than assuming one monolithic, dominant cultural filter.

High school teachers who continue to work in collaboration with Columbus State English faculty will teach Third Space English. The Columbus State teachers will serve as inquiry partners and provide any necessary professional support.

5.0 Lessons Learned for Now and the Future

Too often, the term *professional development* has connotations of an activity that must be performed or a meeting that must be attended for the purpose of checking off a required box. Teachers, particularly College Credit Plus instructors, are incredibly busy people with many and varied demands on their time. If we ask them to participate in professional development, we must make sure that we offer value to teachers.

Most importantly, CCP Curriculum has come to recognize the significance of forming partnerships across what sometimes feels like the big divide between K-12 and higher education. We have discovered expertise in both worlds that must be acknowledged and respected. As educators, we all seek the best for a student, whether we meet them in high school, at Columbus State, or anywhere else. For CCP Curriculum, professional development has become professional *learning*, which is not merely about a transaction between us (the college) and them (the high school) but hopefully becomes a transformation in the work we do together.

Our mission statement:

Collaboration between K-12 and college partners is at the heart of CCP professional learning. We want to provide relevant and timely information to support best practices for college teaching, and we want to facilitate an environment, an ethos, where we foster a community of teacher-learners.

We always want to learn from one another. Practically speaking, this means that we will continue to seek collaborative opportunities such as Third Space English. We will keep facilitating conversations about fortifying the pipeline between K-12 and postsecondary education opportunities for students. Though the i3 grant term is coming to a close, Columbus State's College Credit Plus Curriculum Office plans to continue to innovate and iterate and to seek more and better professional learning opportunities for all of our teachers

“Throughout this project, I have learned about creating and teaching English courses at the high school level and about how to not only reach underserved demographics within high school communities effectively, but also how to set them upon a path to success. Working with high school teachers has been rewarding, as I understand more about what it takes to create a safe and brave environment within the high school English classroom. As an instructor, this collaboration has shown me that there is much to learn about social and emotional learning standards, trauma-informed teaching, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. Working on the Third Space project has given me the opportunity to participate in conversations about these topics with incredible colleagues, and it has allowed me to grow as a teacher myself as I think about my own college courses. I am fortunate to have been a part of the Third Space collaboration.”

–**Whitney Larson**, Columbus State Instructor of English

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