A Venn Diagram of Secondary-Postsecondary Teaching and Learning: The Transformative Power of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships

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Recommended Citation
DOI: http://doi.org/10.14305/jn.29945720.2023.1.1.03
Available at: https://surface.syr.edu/cer/vol1/iss1/5

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INTRODUCTION

In 2002, I stepped away from a comfortable and successful decade-long career teaching high school English to follow an undeniable inner pull: I needed a new professional challenge. My master’s degree in English opened doors to adjunct positions at two local universities, and over the course of a summer, I moved from teaching writing to high school seniors to teaching writing to college freshmen. The work did not feel like much of a stretch. And while I was not considered a candidate for any full-time positions (because I lacked a terminal degree), I held tightly to the thought: “if I can only get my foot in the door, I will be able to prove myself.” That thought held true in spring 2003, when the University of Findlay (UF) welcomed me into their English department as a full-time instructor. The catch? I would have to work and pursue a doctorate simultaneously. I accepted that challenge.

Twenty years later, as I reflect on my professional entry into higher education, two points stand out to me: first, I landed that full-time position because my pedagogical training and teaching experience resulted in course evaluations that described my classroom as a place of rigor and support. Second, even though my students seemed happy and met course learning outcomes, I still had room to grow.
in my craft. During those late nights of doctoral coursework, I came to find names and theories that explained, clarified, and even justified my approaches to writing instruction. This new-found knowledge fed and humbled me. Eventually, I was meshing readings and concepts from graduate school with active learning strategies from my high school teaching days in order to meet my students where they were as learners. It felt good.

I share this short introductory narrative as it reveals important “a-ha” moments in my shift from secondary to postsecondary sites of education. To acknowledge the significance in the complexity of my movement (and anyone’s movement, for that matter) from one educational space to the other is to acknowledge the intricacies and unspoken rules inherent to both. A certain irony dwells in the similarities found within the differences of these spaces. Instructors are “teachers” in one setting, “professors” in another, yet they share a goal of student learning. Both educational spaces structure learning by objectives and content, but the academic calendar, class length, meeting frequency, and delivery modes may vary. Secondary and postsecondary instructors participate in professional development; however, the forms of PD range from in-service meetings and professional learning communities to scholarly research and academic conferences. And while social interaction among instructors might occur in high school teachers’ lounges in one instance and in college department meetings in another, the exchange of ideas and gossip remain inherent. Undoubtedly, others have experienced a similar contradiction of disjointedness and familiarity upon segueing between secondary and postsecondary teaching.

My understanding of the distinctiveness as well as the overlaps that characterize PK-12 and higher education has deepened over the years thanks to the collaborative relationships I have enjoyed with a talented and dedicated team of secondary English instructors who teach UF college writing courses at their respective high schools. None of us grew up dreaming of a career that included CE, and we entered into this journey with varied purposes and experiences. Our shared work on behalf of CE students has been messy, wonderful, illuminating, and professionally rewarding. In simplest terms, we have found that something transformative happens when high school and college instructors interact with a shared goal of meeting student-learner needs. Miller and Rose (2022) ask: “how can we foster greater cross-pollination of ideas between these two sets of teachers, cross-pollination that would enhance the strengths of both groups? Is it conceivable to transform those who are geographically close into a single set of colleagues who are aware of the ‘steps’ of education from one grade level to the next?” (p. 263). The answer to that second question is “yes.” The “how” requires humility, intentionality, and respect from both groups. It also demands equity and care as evidenced in the “mutual exchange of ideas and expertise
among all participants” (Gilfus, Conrey, & Nappa-Carroll, 2021, p. 247).

This essay explores CE as a site where secondary and postsecondary instructors can collaboratively investigate convergences in their approaches to teaching so they are better poised to glean the best from each. The essay begins with a brief overview of three “gaps” that affect alignment and cohesion in the educational continuum: 1) student preparedness; 2) secondary and postsecondary structures, functions, and cultures; and 3) instructor preparation. The gap metaphor is then examined in order to reframe the discussion from a deficit model to that of a Venn Diagram where cogent relationships between secondary and postsecondary learning come into view. Here CE enters the conversation with its “complicated intersections of people, places, and curriculum” (Gilfus, Conrey, & Nappa-Carroll, 2021, p. 62) and its potential for “improv[ing] the transition from high school to college by uniting secondary and postsecondary education” (Mokher & McLendon, 2009). What follows is an emphasis on instructor collaboration with respect and reciprocity of best practices across educational contexts. This premise of shared professional growth among high school and college instructors situates CE as a site of learning for students and their teachers. Evidence is shared from current literature on CE, Dual Enrollment (DE), Dual Credit, Career Tech Prep, and Early College High Schools (ECHS) to demonstrate the challenges and rewards of this approach. The essay ends with recommendations for reassessing what constitutes “readiness” to teach college courses, redesigning secondary and postsecondary approaches to better support students, and renewing our commitment to teaching and learning through a focus on non-hierarchical educational collaboration.

Educational “Gaps”

Gap One: Student Preparedness

“Gaps” in student preparedness, like those I have witnessed from the time I first began helping students navigate the shift from high school to college writing expectations, are well documented (Denecker, 2013; McCrimmon, 2014; Dennihy, 2015; McWain, 2018), and are prevalent in the scholarship on secondary/postsecondary education, in general. For decades, researchers have explored gaps in student preparedness for college (Stanford, 2022; Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015; Appleby, 2014; Hughes & Edwards, 2012; Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007; Johnston & Viadero, 2000). Dependent upon the report, students demonstrate deficiencies in reading proficiency (Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015); mathematic abilities (Stanford, 2022); knowledge of college resources, critical thinking skills,
and/or the ability to take responsibility for their own learning (Appleby, 2014), among others. Root causes cited for contributing to these learning gaps include but are not limited to “inequities in family income and wealth, parental resources, [and] early childhood education” (Mintz, 2022). Most recently the discussion of gaps has turned to that of additional learning losses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic with larger losses evidenced among those with low socioeconomic status (Enzghell, Frey, & Verhagen, 2021; Hammerstein, et al., 2021; Zeirer, 2021; Maldonado & De Witte, 2022). Researchers predict widening gaps in learner preparation in the coming years (Hammerstein, et al. 2021). To that point, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Ohio (AICUO) (2023) reported that just one-third of high school graduates met math and science benchmarks in 2022. Beyond academics, the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) noted the pandemic’s negative impact on students’ socio-emotional and behavioral development and cited an increase in disrespectful actions and absenteeism among students.

**Gap Two: Secondary and Postsecondary Structures, Cultures, and Functions**

Layered beneath the concept of student preparedness gaps lies another, larger “gap,” which consists of “structural, cultural, and functional differences between high school and college institutions” (Hughes & Edwards, p. 31). These include distinctions in schedules, contact time, curriculum, and pedagogical strategies, as well as procedures, responsibilities, requirements, grading practices, rigor, expectations for student behavior, and norms (Mollet et al., 2020; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Howley et al., 2013; Ferguson, Baker, & Burnett, 2015). Additionally, college grades traditionally hinge on fewer assignments, and learners must be more proactive in exercising self-discipline, managing time, and seeking support (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2011). In sum, incongruities across the two educational planes have led to a perception that “work in college is harder, there is more of it, it must be completed in a shorter time period, and most of it must be done outside the school environment” (Appleby, 2014, p. 1). And while it is not the aim of this essay to provide an historical review of how the structural, cultural, and functional differences of secondary and postsecondary education came to be, the point remains that anomalies between the two exist and learners get caught in the middle.

**Gap Three: Instructor Preparation**

Teaching methods cannot be uncoupled from that perception that “work in college is harder”—which it certainly is to some extent as more complex concepts
and skills are broached and developed. However, especially at the freshman level, is college work really that much “harder”? Or is it just different since the classroom cultures and pedagogical approaches of PK-12 and higher education instruction vary? Specific to ECHS, DE, and CE scholarship, discrepancies in teaching methods are sources of tension (and potential growth) for secondary and postsecondary instructors (Conrey & Nappa-Carroll, 2021; Mollet, et al., 2020; Elias, 2015; McCrimmon, 2010). For example, conventional wisdom sets up college instructors in “sage on the stage” roles where they teach as they were taught with a goal of transmitting content, while PK-12 instructors are better known for active learning strategies and student-centered approaches. To borrow from McCrimmon (2010), a common perception then is that college faculty understand content better and high school faculty understand students better. Certainly, some truth lies behind this claim. As explained by Jensen (2011), prospective high school teachers must develop content knowledge and study how learners process information. They must also develop efficacious instructional strategies, which include but are not limited to taking “courses in child and adolescent development, multicultural and special needs education, cognitive psychology, behavioral theories, classroom management, the use of technology in the classroom, and curriculum design” (ibid, p. 30). In contrast, their higher education counterparts who have intentions of teaching must earn a graduate degree in content. Some, but not all, may have opportunities to serve as Teaching Assistants and/or receive training in pedagogical strategies; however, this supplemental professional development is not mandated.

**Concurrent Enrollment and the “Gap” Metaphor**

As this brief overview demonstrates, ongoing conversations of secondary and postsecondary education have gravitated toward “gap” metaphors to explain the current variabilities in PK-16 education. “Gaps” exist in student readiness; in educational structures, functions, and culture; and in instructor preparation. Despite (and perhaps because of) the prevalence of educational “gaps,” Lueck and Nordquist (2022) caution that this metaphor “communicate[s] an enduring confidence in the stability of institutions and stages of education and thereby reduce[s] complex, co-constitutive relationships to questions of bridge building . . .” (p. 44). As a result, the gap metaphor obstructs all the personal, societal, and cultural influences on systems of education as well as the potential for positive symbiotic secondary-postsecondary relationships. To rely, then, too heavily on the gap metaphor is to situate secondary and postsecondary education as static, monolithic entities. The logic that follows suggests that gaps are inevitable since these entrenched spaces are not subject to
any real change or alignment. Consequently, the “discourse of bridging reinscribes bounded places and gaps between them” (Lueck & Nordquist, 2022, p. 44). Such a stance leaves no room for the dynamic nature of learning which—above all else—should and can resist rigid boundaries. A gap mentality, then, discourages a mindset that might search for answers in the complex congruities of the educational structures, themselves, and instead positions the problem simply as a learner issue.

I offer in response to the gap metaphor the image of a Venn Diagram of secondary-postsecondary teaching and learning:

Figure 1: Venn Diagram of Secondary-Postsecondary Teaching and Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PK – 12</th>
<th>CE</th>
<th>Higher Ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teacher trained in pedagogy</td>
<td>teach students deliver content are part of existing cultures work within structures share ideas participate in PD</td>
<td>professor trained in content semester courses high-stakes tests (traditionally) lecture-based conferences &amp; research accredititing bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year-long courses</td>
<td>multiple grades (usually) activity-based in-service meetings state standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The center of the diagram denotes some, but not all, elements in common between PK-12 and higher educational structures. Please read the list of center elements with a “We all” sentence stem starter. The outer bands of the diagram represent what might be considered traditional characteristics of each unique learning environment. Again, this list is not exhaustive.

At its center is the Concurrent Enrollment classroom where high school and college are superimposed—not neatly and not without challenge or tension. Herein exists a place for exploring cogent secondary and postsecondary relationships while
simultaneously reimagining education. McCrimmon (2010), in his discussion of DE composition, considers how instructors might “take full advantage of the merging contexts” of Concurrent Enrollment spaces in order to “draw from the best practices and features of both settings” (p. 222). Similarly, Conrey and Nappa-Carroll (2021) argue that high school and college instructors and their students can benefit from reciprocal CE partnerships when innovative pedagogies are shared and research opportunities are mutually explored. Through these collaborations, “the discovery and implementation of locally-developed college readiness practices are far more likely to happen . . .” (ibid, 259). The success of this approach, and its probability to positively impact student learning across the PK-16 continuum relies on the willingness of high school and college instructors to recognize and champion each other as collaborators in a shared enterprise.

**When Instructors Collaborate**

As mentioned earlier, I have spent well over a decade working as a Faculty Liaison (FL) with a cadre of high school English teachers (known as Concurrent Enrollment Instructors or CEIs) to deliver the University of Findlay’s College Writing I courses to high school students. Our relationship has grown through a variety of means including the multiple-day, course-specific orientation every CEI participates in prior to teaching the course for the first time. As a group, we participate in annual professional development each summer and fall, check in periodically and share ideas through email or Zoom, and collectively muster up energy to review portfolios of student writing at the end of each semester. We reflect on teaching and learning during site visits, calibrate our grading, and contemplate how to create inviting educational spaces that balance support and rigor. We vent, mull, and dream over changes needed in our respective systems and in education, in general. We also break bread, laugh, and share stories of our families, our pets, and our losses. We disagree at times, and we tease, cajole, and nurture one another. We welcome new folks into our fold and stay in touch with those who have moved on to new adventures. We are colleagues, co-researchers, and even friends. In my estimation, we collaborate in meaningful and productive ways.

The secondary-postsecondary instructor relationships I have been privileged to enjoy are not unique. Syracuse University and Indiana University (among others) have developed programs that resist “traditional, top-down models of mentorship” (Conrey & Nappa-Carroll, 2021, p. 249) and, instead, place emphasis on “shar[ing] successful classroom strategies and innovative approaches” (Farris, 2022, xi). In these instances, secondary-postsecondary instructor relationships are driven by
two guiding principles: mutual respect and the desire to meet learner needs. The second cannot happen without the first. Unfortunately, not all CE partnerships are predicated on mutual respect, and sometimes they are not even “partnerships,” in the true sense of the word, at all. For example, numerous studies cite concerns of various stakeholders (college instructors, researchers, administrators, the general public) regarding high school instructors’ abilities to teach college courses appropriately in terms of content and/or rigor (Bishop-Clark, Hurn, & Perry, 2010; Speroni, 2011; Duncheon & Relles, 2020; Howley, et al., 2013). Various assumptions are embedded in those concerns—from “high school courses lack challenge” to “secondary instructors do not have the content knowledge to teach at the college level.” As a result, much time and effort has been put toward the credentialing of high school teachers so that their qualifications “mirror” those of their postsecondary colleagues (Dounay-Zinth, 2015, p. 5). Specifically, accrediting bodies such as the Higher Learning Commission require CE instructors to hold a master’s degree in content or a master’s degree (or higher) in another discipline plus “a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline in which he or she is teaching” (HLC, 2020, p. 3). To possess the appropriate credentials, then, is to be “ready” to teach college courses, and as a result, to be worthy of respect in CE spaces.

Other challenges to building relationships in CE spaces derive from a number of factors including a lack of investment in time, planning, or resources devoted to bringing the two groups together under the umbrella of common work. Several studies cite situations where Concurrent Enrollment Instructors and college faculty have limited interaction or lack communication (Elias, 2015; Howley, et al., 2013); encounter discord when trying to understand the norms of the other group (Mollet, et al., 2020); navigate contradictory instructions from PK-12 and higher education administrators (Duncheon & Relles, 2020); or feel like they “serve two masters” due to competing agendas or requirements (Duncheon & Relles, 2020, p. 1000). Just as troubling are instances where institutions impose their cultural norms (Mollet, et al., 2020) or actively work against the other (Malek & Micchiche, 2017). Each of these examples suggests a lack of willingness to change or to see value in the other sides’ approach to education. The result? Lost opportunities to build congruity in teaching and learning.

Just a little additional digging reveals an even deeper root that can prohibit true partnership building: educational hierarchies. Evidence of this is embedded in the notion that teaching CE courses is “prestigious” for high school instructors, while college instructors are “stuck” with that role (Hebert, 2001, p. 34; Mollet et al., 2020). Likewise, Wilkinson (2019) points out, “a unidirectional relationship between high school teachers and college administrators” is common among CE programs (p. 89),
and Conrey and Nappa-Carroll (2021) caution programs about positioning “faculty liaisons as lightbringers in matters of college preparation” (p. 259). In other words, Faculty Liaison and Concurrent Enrollment Instructor relationships, like the one in which I participate, can be solely top-down if not approached with an openness on the part of the FL to learn from and alongside the CEIs. In Howley et al.’s (2013) study, college faculty “often reported situations in which they assumed the prerogatives of leadership—and in the process marginalized their high school teacher colleagues” (p. 95). Credentialing mandates also serve to re-inscribe the hierarchy in that they set graduate coursework alone as the marker of readiness to teach college classes—and as a result, undervalue the pedagogical training and experience of high school instructors.

The rootedness of PK-16 hierarchies has even led some high school instructors to second guess the value of their own pedagogical approaches. In one Texas study, ECHS instructors “worried that student-centered approaches would leave their early college students ill-prepared . . . They assumed students needed exposure to college teaching styles to become [college] ready” (Duncheon & Relles, 2019). This response is worth unpacking as it assumes: 1) college teaching is lecture-based; 2) students need to be ready for lecture-style instruction if they are going to college; and, most importantly, 3) student-centered/active learning strategies are not “college teaching.” Assumptions such as these (and the hierarchies that drive them) fail to recognize the grounding of high school instructor preparation in “learning styles, teaching techniques, developmental stages, and assessment and evaluation”—training that “may prove extremely beneficial in teaching high school students’ college-level coursework” (Hebert, 2001, p. 34). Strategies gleaned from that training could also help college instructors consider what practices they might incorporate to better promote student success and retention—especially in entry-level math, science, and English courses. Granted, colleges and universities “own” the courses being taught in CE programs and must account for the content and parity of those courses; however, the high school has a stake and a voice in assuring quality instruction as well.

When secondary and postsecondary instructors push aside hierarchies and work together in CE spaces to meet the needs of learners, the reality of what constitutes teacher-readiness for college instruction becomes clearer. Bishop-Clark, Hurn, & Perry (2010) explain in their study of secondary and postsecondary math and science teachers that: “As university faculty and high school faculty got to know one another, the university instructors were increasingly convinced that the courses were being taught at the college level” (p. 88). Likewise, Burdick & Greer’s (2017) work with Concurrent Enrollment writing instructors has led them to advocate for a
“more contextualized lens” for determining college teaching readiness that includes “knowledge of students, knowledge of content, and the flexibility to adapt within particular contexts” (p. 87). Similarly, Wilkinson (2019) argues that “Dual-credit programs should acknowledge that high school teachers are experts in their own right often coming in with many years of classroom experience . . .” (p. 91). To put it simply, a Venn diagram of CE can resituate “readiness to teach college” from credentialing alone to a more nuanced awareness of effective instruction as tied to an intentional mix of content knowledge and pedagogy.

Obviously, Venn Diagrams reveal places of overlap. Their contours resist gaps, and their intertwined natures suggest reciprocity, not hierarchy, as a place from which to cultivate best practices in teaching and learning. Respect and reciprocity underscore work done in Portland State University’s Spanish Challenge Program where: “. . . exposure to the continually renewed pedagogical experience of the high school teachers challenges university faculty to keep their teaching and research fresh and responsive” (Sloan, 2019, p. 267). Furthermore, “The wisdom and practices of high school instructors and the insights of high school students are carried back to the university and disseminated . . . to faculty members who are not participating in the program” (Sloan, 2019, p. 267). Burdick & Greer (2017) note, too, that college Writing Program Administrators “might find that creating dialogic relationships with their counterparts in secondary schools improves the teaching of writing in both high school classrooms and on campus” (p. 93). Similarly, high school instructors and college faculty co-teaching in an Ohio CE chemistry course adjusted curriculum to increase depth with a goal of improving students’ scientific literacy; a suggestion followed “that college chemistry faculty should also consider adopting such curricular revisions” (White, Hopkins, & Shockley, 2014, p. 36). Bishop-Clark, Hurn, & Perry (2010), in their study of an Ohio career tech prep program, found “the relationship between the college faculty and the high school faculty” as integral to success (p. 88). High school and college colleagues in the program met regularly, stayed in touch through email, and participated in bi-directional classroom visits (ibid). According to the authors, “As with many mentoring relationships, the mentors learned much from their mentees” and grew to see each other as “colleagues sharing information” (ibid, p. 89). In other words, they have cultivated what Conrey and Nappa-Carroll (2021) call an “equitable mentorship” where participants interact critically and generously (p. 250).

To borrow from Dennihy (2015), “Lack of knowledge about—and, worse, unwillingness to understand—what is happening in classrooms and institutions beyond our own not only weakens the quality of our teaching but also hinders the success of our students” (p. 167). A Venn Diagram of instructional possibilities
emerges when secondary and postsecondary instructors in CE spaces work together with respect and intention. They might even find, as those in Howley, et al.’s (2013) study did, “significant overlap in content between the high school and the college” (p. 93). The next step is for instructors to utilize that knowledge of content, pedagogy, and more—as derived from CE collaborations—to better meet student learners, no matter the educational context.

**Recommendations**

Reassess Readiness to Teach College

Readiness to teach college courses should imply an ability on the part of instructors to appropriately challenge and facilitate students’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes for particular discipline-specific coursework. To be best equipped for this work, instructors need a mix of content knowledge, pedagogical strategies, and insight into how students learn. With that said, a high school teacher’s degree in education should be considered an advantage (Hebert, 2001, p. 34) in any conversation of college teaching readiness. At the same time, CEIs “have unique needs associated with transitioning from high school to college-level expectations and benefit from the cultivation of a relationship with the full-time faculty in the discipline . . .” (Charlier & Duggan, 2009, p. 108). Here guidance from the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) in the form of the Faculty Liaison/Concurrent Enrollment Instructor relationship serves as a good model. FLs help approve instructors and provide CEIs with training that orients them to the course(s) they will teach. They also support CEIs in crafting syllabi and assessments that align with course learning outcomes, facilitate annual discipline-specific professional development, and utilize site visits to ensure course parity (NACEP Accreditation Guide, 2020). While these relationships could be top-down, NACEP advocates professional development that is “reciprocal in nature” (Allen, et al., 2015, p. 8). With this guidance in mind, I urge that we move the current conversation of what constitutes readiness to teach college courses from one narrowly focused on credentialing to one that explores “readiness” as more holistically determined through an intersection of credentials, experience, and high-quality partnerships.

Redesign Secondary and Postsecondary Approaches to Better Support Students

Along with insight into college teaching readiness, the Venn Diagram of CE
reveals other places where reciprocal relationships between PK-12 and higher education can inform how each does business—most specifically in overall approaches to the structure and delivery of content. For example, CE partnerships through the University of Findlay have resulted in the alteration of schedules at several high schools in an attempt to better mirror college contact time with at least one day per week serving as instructor “office hours.” Also, in response to high school partners’ requests, study skills and career planning courses are now available through UF’s CE program to help acquaint students with differences they might encounter if they choose to pursue a two or four-year degree upon high school graduation. Just as importantly, knowledge gleaned from CE partnerships is helping guide college efforts to ameliorate learning losses associated with the pandemic. To that point, chemistry instructors have turned to more frequent, low-stakes assignments to hold students accountable for their learning and pinpoint specific areas of misunderstanding or need. They have also moved to an “open office hours” approach in a study-hall-like space that allows for students to collaborate on practice problems with the guidance of their instructors. Likewise writing faculty and TAs now hold “office hours” in the Writing Center—a communal, student-friendly space. Finally, instructors in English and communication share teaching materials through Canvas (UF’s learning management system), while joint research projects among English FLs and CEIs have led to collaborative state and national presentations and workshops. Such opportunities serve to reinforce the ongoing professional development and career satisfaction of both. Work like this is happening elsewhere. However, further reporting and research of these and similar efforts is needed to gauge impact and success if we are to capitalize on a “the best of both” approach. In addition, future studies should look to capture CE’s two-way ripple effect—as participating instructors share strategies with middle school colleagues or those who teach upper division college courses.

Renew Our Commitment to Teaching and Learning Through Educational Collaboration

Elsewhere I argue that transitioning high school writers to college writing expectations “is not so much about what the students do as it is about what the instructors know or understand about composition practices on both sides of the divide” (Denecker, 2013, p. 31, original emphasis). I contend the same is true for education in general. However, if the CE space is to be used effectively to renew efforts that support student learning, then PK-12 and higher education leaders must demonstrate their commitment by providing adequate time and resources
for instructors to learn with and from one another. According to Olwell (2021), successful college in high school programs “require visionary leadership at the top” (p. 15) as well as adequate infrastructure, and “It often takes a full planning year for these K-12 and higher education institutions to see one another’s perspectives” (ibid, p. 14). Specifically, leadership must prioritize instructor interaction and provide travel reimbursement, meals, resources, and substitute teacher support, as necessary. Beyond that, secondary and postsecondary leaders must also assure equitable and appropriate compensation and labor conditions (such as course caps) in order to sustain and further professionalize CE work.

Support of instructors as described above directly indicates a commitment to student learning. Zeek’s research (2007) notes that investment in collaborative efforts “opened up communications between the public school system and the college and paved the way for more dual offerings” (n.p.). In Iowa, CE and community college instructors have the means to network and “exchange teaching strategies” and resources (Hanson, Prusha, & Iverson, 2015). Similarly, in Portland State University’s Spanish Challenge Program high school and college faculty participate in workshops that “focus on strategies to enhance student performance, heighten teacher effectiveness, and improve content-based instruction” (Sloan, 2019, p. 265). In their study of a North Carolina ECHS, Ari, et al.’s (2017) findings reiterate the importance of “policies promoting teacher development, wellness, and retention” (p. 29). Furthermore, they note that dedicated instructors who engage students and care about their learning are integral to combatting “a host of setbacks to succeeding in higher education settings” (ibid, p. 28). Finally, Duncheon and Relles (2020) describe the benefits of making time for instructors to have discussions “that go beyond simply identifying skills or terms, such as ‘rigor’ or ‘maturity,’ to actually making sense collectively of what those terms mean what they should look like in practice” (p. 474). Simply put, an investment in instructor professional development equals an investment in students.

Yet another way educational leaders can promote the transformative power of cross-institutional partnerships is to seek out and position “border crossers” to help facilitate this work (Howley et al., 2013). A unique subset of instructors and administrators, border crossers as described by Howley et al. (2013), possess both PK-12 and higher education experience, which results in more egalitarian approaches within CE spaces. Since they possess “practical” and “ideological” knowledge of both educational landscapes (ibid, p. 92), these individuals can more deftly navigate each system and unite stakeholders in productive conversations that can lead to positive educational change. As Mollet et al. (2020) note, “participants who had experience in both K-12 and higher education contexts demonstrated the greatest
flexibility in identifying solutions” that reinforced student learning (p. 238). In other words, border crossers can help the Venn Diagram of secondary and postsecondary teaching and learning come more clearly into focus.

**Conclusion: Towards a Venn Diagram of Learning**

I will end this essay where it began, with a story. Long before I became a high school and then college writing instructor, I entered my undergraduate degree believing I would one day teach classrooms of kindergartners like my mother before me. While that goal changed, something important from that time in my life stuck: inside every learner is a kindergartner—one who needs engagement, direction, boundaries, chances to succeed and fail, and a safe place to grow and be stretched. No matter the space, the age of the students, or the content—teaching, when done well, consists of engaging, challenging, and nurturing learners: those who come to us ready to learn, those who do not, and even those who resist our attempts to help them learn.

PK-12 and higher education structures do not lend themselves easily to cross-institutional collaboration for the greater good. Gap metaphors underscore that complexity. However, through CE, a Venn diagram of secondary and postsecondary learning emerges . . . if we are thoughtful and open enough to look for it. And while the depth of overlaps in Venn diagrams can wax and wane, the point is to discern places of congruity. In doing so, we find the potential to increase alignment and continuity of instruction and thus, better position ourselves as instructors to support and transform student learning—regardless of where that learning takes place.
References


