



TRANSCRIPT

The Expository Reading and Writing Course: Preparing Students for Postsecondary Success

TONY FONG

Hi, my name is Tony Fong and I am a senior researcher with the Regional Educational Laboratory West, or REL West. As part of our work through the College Preparation Partnership, I and my team are partnering with the California State University system to help them review and improve the Expository Reading and Writing Course so that students are better prepared for college-level coursework.

I recently sat down with Nancy Brynelson, who is the co-director for the Center for the Advancement of Reading at the California State University (or CSU) Chancellor's Office, to talk about the important role the Expository Reading and Writing Course plays in preparing students for college-level coursework, and how partnerships between course designers, teachers, and researchers are contributing to the ongoing development of the Expository Reading and Writing Course. We began by discussing the origin and intent of the course.

TONY FONG

Nancy, can you tell us a little bit about ERWC?

NANCY BRYNELSON

I'd be happy to. The Expository Reading and Writing Course started as an effort to support students who were being identified as not yet ready for college-level work in English, and our faculty felt that if we were going to identify students as needing additional preparation before coming to the CSU that there should be an alternative in terms of a 12th grade curriculum.

They proposed a task force and a process to develop such curriculum, and that was back in 2002.

The first meeting of the group—which included CSU faculty, high school teachers, high school administrators, and school district administrators—occurred in 2003. And they started exploring what would then become ERWC.

What we discovered early on was that, as faculty, we didn't know everything that happens in schools, and that as high school teachers, they didn't know everything about what happens in the university and in the first year for students, and so it was really a process of sharing and figuring out what it was that students needed to be better prepared.

The intent of the course was to create a course that would be very different from the traditional literature course and really use texts that were from contemporary world, articles from newspapers, from journals, from the web, from different sources on topics that are really interesting to students and engaging for them; things that students could dig into and discuss, debate, argue, perhaps, and really start to see some of the nuances between position A, position B, and that there may be even lots of other perspectives in between.

Analyzing text in this way, what we're hoping for is for students to have a deeper sense of ownership over what they've read and a deeper understanding and a more critical view.

TONY FONG

This course is especially important now, because as of April 2017, the CSU system no longer offers remedial coursework to incoming freshmen. With the Expository Reading and Writing Course, students can take this course for high school credit, and at the same time really prepare for the transition to college.

You mentioned that the team has been working for a number of years, since at least 2004. Can you talk about the process of revising the course?

NANCY BRYNELSON

Well, I think I should start by talking about the way in which we provide professional learning because early on, we decided that this was a partnership. It's a partnership between the California State University, local county offices of education, and school districts, so every workshop we do is facilitated by a team of two people: someone from higher education, typically a faculty member from CSU, and someone from the high school level, typically a teacher. And so that partnership is manifested visibly in the way we conduct our workshops, and it extends also to the way we write our curriculum and revise our curriculum.

In the next five years or so, we're really looking at: How do we sustain the curriculum into the future; how do we respond to a more technologically rich environment; how do we bring that into their curriculum; how do we support different groups of students, students who are English learners, students with disabilities?

TONY FONG

One really interesting thing about this course is that it was designed for high engagement from both teachers and students. I asked Nancy about her thoughts on this.

NANCY BRYNELSON

We've had over 13,500 teachers go through our professional learning, so we feel like we've had an impact on the profession and on the way that English is taught in general.

It's in the hands of a really talented teacher that it comes alive, and so we often say it's not just a curriculum, it's a community of learners, of students themselves and teachers. And we have relied on the professionalism and the expertise of teachers to implement this curriculum in ways that work for their students and that yield results.



We do take a particular stance about students, and that many more students are capable of engaging in truly academic ways who never thought of themselves as being able to do that before.

TONY FONG

In 2015, a study of over 5,000 12th grade students in 24 high schools across 9 California school districts found that the Expository Reading and Writing Course has a positive impact on student achievement.

REL West's College Preparation Partnership seeks to further understand the context in which the Expository Reading and Writing Course is delivered and improving its delivery, and to examine how the course is being used by teachers and students across the state.

During our interview, Nancy shared why she thinks this partnership will be beneficial as the course undergoes its third round of revisions.

NANCY BRYNELSON

Well, I think it's really important to have an outside perspective and not to presume that everything we're doing is the best it can be. And so getting information from different sources of data and different perspectives from teachers, school administrators, and the kind of analysis you're doing is important.

Years and years ago, the first question was, "Does this work?" and I think we have an answer to that now. Yes, it does work, but we're always looking to continue to study and answer the question in different ways: How well is it working? What are ways that we can improve?

TONY FONG

Well, thank you, Nancy, for the time spent today. We really appreciate the partnership, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and the CSU.

NANCY BRYNELSON

You're very welcome. We're looking forward to it, too.

TONY FONG

To learn more about REL West and the College Preparation Partnership, please contact relwest@wested.org.

This video is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. To learn more, visit ies.ed.gov.