Attribution of Responsibility for College Readiness in High Schools

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This study explored the attribution of responsibility for teaching skills and strategies associated with college readiness in a sample of 847 teachers, 69, counselors, 53 administrators who completed the College Career Ready School Diagnostic in the spring of 2011. We found that school staff most often attributed responsibility for teaching Key Learning Skills and Strategies and the Key Cognitive Strategies to teachers, however teachers attributed responsibility to themselves just 56% and 50% of the time respectively. The results of this study can inform schools about how to best target professional development towards staff to ensure that all staff are responsible for student development of the Key Cognitive Strategies and Key Learning Skills and Strategies.

Key words: Academic Outcomes, Attribution, Survey Research

Objectives

This study explored the attribution of responsibility for teaching skills and strategies associated with college readiness in a sample of 847 teachers, 69, counselors, 53 administrators who completed the College Career Ready School Diagnostic in the spring of 2011. We found that users most often attributed responsibility for teaching Key Learning Skills and Strategies and the Key Cognitive Strategies to teachers, however teachers attributed responsibility to themselves just 56% and 50% of the time respectively. The results of this study can inform schools about how to best target professional development towards staff to ensure that all staff are responsible for student development of the Key Cognitive Strategies and Key Learning Skills and Strategies.

Theoretical Framework

The Common Core State Standards movement (CCSS; National Governors Association [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010) and a subsequent initiative led by the Race to the Top Assessment Program (United States Department of Education, 2010) has brought college and career readiness to the forefront of high school instructional programs. In addition to subject-specific standards in English/Language Arts and mathematics, the CCSS emphasize cross-disciplinary standards to be integrated throughout high school courses in order to better prepare students for the rigors of college coursework. Concurrently, the Race to the Top Fund emphasizes teacher effectiveness as a major reform area (United States Department of Education, 2009). Given this recent policy activity, there is an increasing need for policy studies that connect teacher effectiveness with instruction associated with college and career readiness.

Student enrollment in college is also increasing rapidly. Between 1993 and 2007, student enrollment in college increased 28% and is projected to increase to approximately 20 million students by 2018 (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). Of eighth grade students participating in the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), 88% reported having postsecondary aspirations (Venezia, Kirst & Antonio, 2003) and in a sample of 8106 students who participated in the CollegeCareerReady™ School Diagnostic, 66% of students reported planning to attend a 2- or 4-year college (Gilkey, Seburn, Conley, 2011). Further, while a student may be able to meet admission requirements and be accepted to college, many students enter college unprepared. By some estimates, 40% of students take at least one remedial course in college (Adelman, 1999; Attewell, Lavin,

Domina & Levey, 2006). Conley (2005, 2007, 2010) differentiates between college eligibility and college readiness, and defines college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in credit-bearing general education courses that meet requirements for a baccalaureate degree."

In light of this definition, which emphasizes success over access, Conley has developed a model of college and career readiness, that describes the skills, strategies and knowledge that students need to prepare for and successfully transition to college. The elements of the Four Keys to model are assessed by the CollegeCareerReady™ School Diagnostic and are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Four Dimensions of College Readiness

Dimension	Definition
Key Cognitive Strategies	The patterns of intellectual behavior that lead to the development of skills and capabilities necessary for college work. These include problem formulation, research, interpretation, communication, and precision/accuracy.
Key Content Knowledge	The strong, grounding foundation for the understanding of academic disciplines. Includes English and language arts (ELA), mathematics, natural science, second language(s), and social science.
Key Learning Skills and Strategies	The attitudes and behavioral attributes that students who succeed in college must demonstrate. Key Learning Skills and Strategies require students to take responsibility for their own learning through self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control.
Key Transitional Skills and Strategies	The privileged knowledge and skills that are necessary to enroll in college and understand how college operates as a system and a culture, these include a general understanding of college admissions processes, career and college culture, and tuition and financial aid.

Note. Adapted from Conley (2005, 2007, 2010)

Although there is much emphasis on college and career readiness, many students are not fully prepared for rigorous college coursework and it is unclear where schools and educators should begin to improve student preparedness. Exploring the responsibility educators feel for college and career readiness provides important environmental context that can be used to identify and prioritize next steps.

Data Sources

Data were collected through the spring 2011 administration of the CollegeCareerReady™ School Diagnostic (CCRSD). The CCRSD was developed in 2009 as a school-level measure to assess the Four Keys Model (Conley, McGaughy, Kirtner, van der Valk, & Martinez-Wenzl, 2010). Preliminary validity evidence has been

established for the Key Learning Skills and Strategies and Key Cognitive Strategies constructs measured by the CCRSD (Conley, 2010; Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011).

All administrators and counselors, all core content teachers, and a representative sample of students in participating schools complete the CCRSD. Upon completion, schools receive a descriptive school profile report outlining results and incorporating specific actionable recommendations for the school to best target limited resources towards areas that need improvement.

In the spring 2011 administration, there were 22 participating schools with 847 teachers, 69, counselors, 53 administrators, and 8186 students. For the purposes of this study, only responses from administrators, counselors, and teachers were analyzed, a description of the sample follows in Table 2.

Table 2
Sample of Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators

User group	N	Ave. years experience	Ave. years experience at current school
Teachers	847	12	7
Counselors	69	8	5
Administrators	53	14	5

Methods

The CollegeCareerReady School Diagnostic (CCRSD) measures the four college readiness dimensions. Versions are available for students, teachers, administrators, and counselors and are comprised of approximately 200 items each. The two items described in Table 3 assess attribution of responsibility for the Key Learning Skills and Strategies and Key Cognitive Strategies..

Table 3
Attribution of Responsibility Items and Response Options

Items	Response Options

Who at your school is primarily responsible to help students develop the Key Learning Skills and Strategies?	Administrators Counselors Teachers College/Career Center Staff All Staff Parents Other Don't Know/NA
Who at your school is primarily responsible to help students develop the Key Cognitive Strategies?	

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis in SPSS.

Results

Key Learning Skills and Strategies

For the Key Learning Skills and Strategies item (see table 3), participants across all schools most frequently selected "Teachers" as the group primarily responsible to help students develop the Key Learning Skills and Strategies (see Table 4). Participants were in agreement that teachers were primarily responsible for teaching the Key Learning Skills and Strategies, followed by college and career center staff, and responses to this item did not differ significantly by role, $\chi 2$ (14, N = 865) = 19.43, p = .15.

Table 4
Attribution of Responsibility for Key Learning Skills and Strategies by User Group

	Respondent		
Response	Teachers	Administrators	Counselors
Administrators	5%	4%	5%
Counselors	1%	0%	3%
Teachers	61%	61%	50%
College/Career Center Staff	25%	31%	34%
All Staff	0%	2%	2%
Parents	0%	0%	2%
Other	1%	2%	0%
Don't Know/NA	7%	0%	3%

Note. Totals may sum to more than 100 due to rounding.

We then determined how frequently staff attributed responsibility for teaching the Key Learning Skills and Strategies to a group other than themselves. These results are displayed in table 5.

Table 5
Attribution of Responsibility for Key Learning Skills and Strategies: Self vs. Other

Response	Respondent		
	Teachers	Administrators	Counselors
Self	56%	3%	3%
Other	38%	97%	94%
Don't Know/NA	7%	0%	3%

Note. Totals may sum to more than 100 due to rounding.

Key Cognitive Strategies

For the Key Cognitive Strategies item (see table 3), participants across schools most frequently selected "Teachers" as the group primarily responsible to help students develop the Key Cognitive Strategies (see table 6). Participants were in agreement that teachers were primarily responsible for teaching the Key Cognitive Strategies, followed by college and career center staff, and responses to this item did not differ significantly by role, $\chi 2$ (6, N = 825) = 5.74, p = .45.

Table 6
Attribution of Responsibility for Key Cognitive Strategies by User Group

Response	Respondent	
	Teachers	Administrators
Administrators	4%	4%
Counselors	0%	0%
Teachers	54%	66%
College/Career Center Staff	20%	19%
All Staff	1%	0%
Parents	0%	0%
Other	1%	2%
Don't Know/NA	21%	9%

Note. Counselors were not asked this question for Key Cognitive Strategies.

We then determined how frequently staff attributed responsibility for teaching the Key Cognitive Strategies to a group other than themselves. These results are displayed in table 7.

Table 7
Attribution of Responsibility for Key Cognitive Strategies: Self vs. Other

Response	Respondent Teachers	Respondent Administrators
Self	50%	0%
Other	30%	88%
Don't Know/NA	20%	12%

Note. Totals may sum to more than 100 due to rounding.

Significance

Teaching students the Key Cognitive Strategies and Key Learning Skills and Strategies should be a shared responsibility school-wide. Research on school reform has focused on collective responsibility for student learning as a key component of successful school organization (Lee et. al., 1993).

In the sample surveyed, both administrators and teachers reported that teachers are primarily responsible for helping students to develop Key Cognitive Strategies. Teachers, administrators and counselors also reported that teachers are primarily response for helping students develop the Key Learning Skills and Strategies. While all groups as a whole agree that the burden of developing these skills seems to fall primarily on teachers, only slightly over half of the teachers acknowledge that this is their responsibility (54% for Key Cognitive Strategies and 61% for Key Learning Skills and Strategies).

While it is not surprising that teachers were the option most frequently selected by all user groups, it is distribution of other options that are perhaps more startling. Of teachers surveyed, 21% reported they do not know who is responsible for developing students Key

Cognitive Strategies (KCS). Of administrators surveyed, 9% said they do not know who is responsible for developing students KCS. Further, very few participants in this sample chose the option "All Staff". For Key Learning Skills and Strategies, no teachers, 2% of administrators, and 2% of counselors selected "All Staff". For Key Cognitive Strategies, only 1% of teachers and no administrators selected "All Staff".

Furthermore, teachers were the only group that frequently selected themselves as opposed to others, however just 56% of teachers attributed responsibility to themselves for teaching the Key Learning Skills and Strategies and 50% of teachers attributed responsibility to themselves for teaching the Key Cognitive Strategies.

Emphasizing the Key Cognitive Strategies is necessary in order to prepare students for the challenging thinking required in college and careers and also to ensure that students remain engaged in school. Emphasizing the Key Learning Skills and Strategies throughout the school enables students to transition smoothly into college (Conley, 2005, 2007, 2010). Further, obtaining high, consistent levels of support for Key Learning Skills and Strategies and Key Cognitive Strategies will make it easier to implement school wide programs to build upon and develop these skills.

With so many students aspiring to attend college, students' academic success in high school is critical. A key factor in student learning outcomes in high school is teachers' willingness to take responsibility for students' academic success (Lee, Bryk, and Smith, 1993). Further, schools that support teacher and staff collaboration are more likely to have teachers assume responsibility for student learning outcomes (Lee and Smith, 1996). Teachers and school staff must feel empowered by administrators and school structure to assume responsibility for students (Lee and Smith, 1996).

It is clear from this study that future research is needed to inform the development of new programs that ensure all staff are responsible for contributing to student acquisition of the necessary Key Cognitive Strategies and Key Learning Skills and Strategies to be successful in college and careers.

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