

## BSI and CTE: What does it all mean?

Lisa Ledeboer, Mt. San Antonio College

When faculty members talk about BSI (Basic Skills Initiative) the conversation usually includes comments such as “that’s Math and English, it’s not us.” Math and English faculty understand Basic Skills, so why does it seem so foreign to CTE (Career Technical Education) faculty?

What are basic skills? “Basic skills are those foundation skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and English as a Second Language, as well as learning skills and study skills, which are necessary for students to succeed in college-level work.” For much more information, visit the BSI website: <http://www.cccbsi.org/>

The bottom line is that Basic Skills students are in every one of our classrooms. Are you concerned about student success and completion? Then you should be thinking about and implementing ideas in your classroom that assist all students, including basic skills students.

I recently attended a BSI/CTE workshop in March that was designed for CTE faculty. The focus was on achieving success for Basic Skills CTE students through Contextualized Teaching and Learning.

At the workshop results from the Washington “Tipping Point” study ([http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research\\_reports/resh\\_06-2\\_tipping\\_point.pdf](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research_reports/resh_06-2_tipping_point.pdf)) were presented. This study found that only 20% of basic skills students completed vocational programs, certificate, or credentials. According to our workshop presenters, only 15% of California Community College basic skills students achieved this level of success.

If students don’t achieve success in basic skills, then they won’t complete our CTE programs and they won’t achieve success in the workforce. We need to work together in order for ALL of our students to be successful. We have to break down the silos and work across departments and divisions.

Some of the ways we can integrate Basic Skills in our classrooms (*with references to resources available at Mt. San Antonio College as an example, please consult comparable resources at your own institutions*) include:

1. **Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL)** where skills are taught in the context of what is required and relevant for industry and/or relevant for general life and survival skills and/or meaningful and relevant to previous knowledge or experience. (*See Work Plan Template at the end of this article to use as a framework to begin a dialogue with colleagues and to develop a work plan with to incorporate contextualized teaching and learning in your unit.*) Examples of CTL include:

- a. Directed Learning Activities: Working with Skills Centers staff (see #2 below), Faculty (both CTE and academic) develop worksheets related to their coursework that students with identified deficits can complete at a Skills Center with the assistance of a tutor/mentor.
- b. Learning Communities: At the conference we had break-out sessions where faculty coordinated with colleagues from their campuses to brainstorm Learning Communities that would benefit their students. One example was a Math professor and an Automotive Professor from The College of the Desert who were planning to set up a Learning Community. Another example is one that we are developing on our campus with a Financial Planning course, a Basic Skills Math course, and a Reading course. Who could you partner with and what type of Learning Community could you create on your campus to assist your students in their successes?
- c. Contextualized Lessons: linking essential skills and academic or occupational content within your CTE courses. This can be done in a wide variety of ways depending on the course material. It can be a Fashion Design professor incorporating fractions into a lesson on developing patterns or a Nutrition and Foods professor incorporating volume measurements into a cooking lesson.

One tool that I took away from this workshop along this concept is the KWL method. I have begun to utilize this concept daily in my Financial Planning class to best assist students in learning the course material. KWL doesn't need to be a classroom activity though. KWL could be used by individual students as they study course material and could be incorporated into chapter assignments.

KWL is composed of three stages, identified by the corresponding letters and reflected in the three column worksheet below.

What we <b>K</b> now (prior to beginning the topic or reading a chapter)	What we <b>W</b> ant to know (or what do we think we're going to learn?)	What we <b>L</b> earned (at the end of the class, after reading the chapter...)

Incorporating KWL in my classroom has increased student involvement significantly and has given me a better understanding of what my students' knowledge base is as we begin a topic, what they want and/or expect to learn about, and what they have learned over the course of a lecture or a weeklong topic.

2. **Skills Centers:** At Mt. SAC we have 4 Skills Centers at various locations across campus for our students:
  - a. TERC (Tech Ed Resource Center) was developed primarily for CTE students, but is also open for all Mt. SAC students. It is housed in our Technology and Health Division building.  
<http://www.mtsac.edu/administration/research/pdf/newsletters/February2009.pdf>
  - b. The Writing Center offers a wide variety of tutoring as well as workshops for students to assist them in improving their writing skills.  
<http://www.mtsac.edu/instruction/humanities/writingcenter/>
  - c. Tutorial Services: The main tutoring center on campus where students can receive free tutoring on a wide variety of subjects.  
<http://www.mtsac.edu/instruction/learning/lac/services/tutorial-services/>
  - d. MARC (Math Activities Resource Center)  
[http://www.mtsac.edu/pathways/rt\\_sh\\_as\\_marc.html](http://www.mtsac.edu/pathways/rt_sh_as_marc.html)
3. **TLC (Teaching and Learning Center):** This is a new resource at Mt. SAC that is dedicated to helping faculty and staff improve student learning. The TLC supports the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Its focus is on improving practices related to “developmental” education. <http://elearn.mtsac.edu/tlc/>
4. **FIGs (Faculty Inquiry Groups):** “Faculty Inquiry is a term that encompasses a broad set of practices that engage teachers in looking closely and critically at student learning for the purpose of improving their own courses and programs.” (*The Promise of Faculty Inquiry for Teaching and Learning Basic Skills*, p. 8, Mary Taylor Huber, 2008.)

One important aspect of championing Basic Skills and CTE on our campuses is that it needs to be faculty driven, not administration driven. It needs to be something we “want” to do to assist our students in their successes rather than something we feel we “have” to do.

Questions that can help begin a dialogue within your CTE Department:

1. Who is the Basic Skills Coordinator at your campus?
2. Who is involved on the Basic Skills Committee on your campus?
3. What faculty resources does your campus have to foster success for Basic Skills students in your CTE program?

4. How can you get involved with Basic Skills within your department and on your campus to improve student success and retention?
5. What activities are currently being funded through Basic Skills on your campus?

There are many Basic Skills workshops across the state this year. To find out about BSI workshops visit: <http://www.cccbsi.org/events>. Many of these events are free for faculty. You may be able to get conference and travel funding on your campus to support you in attending BSI workshops.

There is no time like the present to take up the charge and work to increase our student successes.

**Here are many of the Basic Skills resources (people, websites and literature) available:**

Basic Skills Website: <http://www.cccbsi.org/>

*Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges* (The Poppy Copy), March 2007 (Revised July 2007):  
[http://www.asccc.org/Events/BSI/Lit\\_Review\\_Student\\_Success.pdf](http://www.asccc.org/Events/BSI/Lit_Review_Student_Success.pdf)

Washington "Tipping Point" Study:  
[http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research\\_reports/resh\\_06-2\\_tipping\\_point.pdf](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research_reports/resh_06-2_tipping_point.pdf)

Bay Area Learning Network: <http://baln.edulounge.net/>

Faculty Inquiry Resources:

- *The Promise of Faculty Inquiry for Teaching and Learning Basic Skills*, Mary Taylor Huber, 2008.

[http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/dynamic/publications/elibrary\\_pdf\\_738.pdf](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/dynamic/publications/elibrary_pdf_738.pdf),

- *Guidelines for Inquiry and Action: Guidelines for Working Together to Improve Student Learning*, 2008.

[http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/dynamic/publications/elibrary\\_pdf\\_766.pdf](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/dynamic/publications/elibrary_pdf_766.pdf),

- The California Network: <http://facultyinquiry.net/>

- The TLC website at Mt. SAC <http://elearn.mtsac.edu/tlc/>

KWL Method: <http://www.studygs.net/texred3.htm>

BSI Steering Committee: <http://www.cccbsi.org/steering-committee>

## Contextualized Teaching and Learning Work Plan Template

**Purpose:** To create a “script” for your improvement effort and support implementation.

- Directions:**
1. Using this form as a template, develop a work plan for each goal identified through the needs assessment process. (Modify the form as needed to fit your unique context.)
  2. Distribute copies of each work plan to the members of the collaboration.
  3. Keep copies handy to bring to meetings to review and update regularly. You may decide to develop new work plans for new phases of your reform effort.

**Goal:**

**Results/Accomplishments:**

<b>Action Steps</b> <i>What Will Be Done?</i>	<b>Responsibilities</b> <i>Who Will Do It?</i>	<b>Timeline</b> <i>By When?</i> <i>(Day/Month)</i>	<b>Resources</b> <i>A. Resources Available</i> <i>B. Resources Needed</i> <i>(financial, human, political &amp; other)</i>	<b>Potential Barriers</b> <i>A. What individuals or organizations might resist?</i> <i>B. How?</i>	<b>Communications Plan</b> <i>Who is involved?</i> <i>What methods?</i> <i>How often?</i>
<b>Step 1:</b>			<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	
<b>Step 2:</b>			<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	
<b>Step 3:</b>			<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	
<b>Step 4:</b>			<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	
<b>Step 5:</b>			<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	<b>A.</b>  <b>B.</b>	

**Evidence Of Success** *(How will you know that you are making progress? What are your benchmarks?)*

**Evaluation Process** *(How will you determine that your goal has been reached? What are your measures?)*