TRANSCRIPT

Title: David Conley – Part 1

"This presentation is really going to kind of focus on the notion of college and career readiness from a personalistic perspective. I'm gonna talk to you a little   bit about my background. I'm gonna ask you to think a little bit about yours, and I'm gonna ask you to try to think about college and career readiness from the perspective of students. And we know that this is an issue for which a lot of policy has been developed, and we know there's a lot of activity and interest about how to deal with the systems level issues, and that's all good, and that's important. Ultimately, this comes down to students and what students are willing to do and how students engage in learning, and if we can really get students to ask more of themselves, in the end you can have all the standards in the world, and if all the students are doing is complying with them, doing what they're told, not engaging, not processing deeply, not using their cognitive capabilities and developing them, you will not get the results that you need for a student to be successful in college and careers.

That's the result of research we've been doing for more than a decade, and I'm gonna share some of that with you as we go along. Before we begin I'm gonna ask you to take just a moment. I'm gonna ask you to turn to someone at your table, and I'm gonna ask you in a very quick, little conversation, probably about a minute, to identify whether the transition from high school to college for you was easy and if it was easy or whether it was more challenging, and, if so, why it was challenging. I'm gonna ask you to think about those things then as we go through the presentation today to see if any of those match up with some of the things I'll be talking to you about in terms of what constitutes college and career readiness. So I'm gonna turn you loose, and the volume level's gonna jump up, and in about a minute I'm gonna call you back. And when you hear that, please quickly conclude your conversation, and come back. So turn to someone, and was the transition easy or hard?

I think this is a topic we could probably spend a lot of time on. I'm sure that some of you, the answers to these questions are really pretty fascinating. So just for a show of hands here, and I'm just gonna--this is a very, kind of a rough thing, but I'm gonna ask you to either pick the transition being challenging or the transition being kind of smooth and easy, and I realize it's a continuum, but I'm gonna ask you to pick one or the other. Was it on the side of kind of being kind of smooth and easier, or was it on the side of being kind of challenging? So, first of all, if you do by just a show of hands, please, which of those ones it was, for how many of you was it kind of pretty smooth and easy, it went pretty well? How many of you was it challenging? Okay, I think we're close to 50, 50 on that, and I think it says something--I'd like you to remember and think about the things that when you talked about things that made it easy and the things that made it challenging, and for those of you who had a smooth transition, think about what resources and supports you had to make that happen. For those of you for whom it was challenging, you might think about if you lacked resources or if it was something personal or if it was institutional or what factors caused it to be challenging.

I'm gonna take a minute and tell you a little bit about my background. This will be fairly quick, but I did wanna just kind of tell you my story of my transition from high school to college. I actually grew up in the other California up in the Central Coast near Santa Cruz and then in Silicon Valley back when there were blossoms actually. I lived at the base of Blossom Hill,

which I'm sure everybody now wonders why they named it that. But I was the kind of kid, I did well elementary and middle school, and when I got to high school, we had a fully-tracked high school, X, Y, and Z track. And X track was the top, you know, Y the middle, and Z the bottom, and I got placed into the X track because of my middle school grades and so forth. Unfortunately, some of my behaviors were such that, you know, my friends were all in the Y and the Z track, and I was in the X track, and, you know, my parents were working class. I was first generation. You know, my grandparents were Italian immigrants, and so, I mean, my parents knew school was valuable. They wanted me to do it, but they didn't understand sort of what I should be doing specifically.

So one day without their knowledge or anyone else's I marched into a counselor's office, and I said, "I wanna go from the X track to the Y track." And to this day I really don't understand what actually happened. He said, "Okay," and just switched me. I was perfectly happy with that, but there was a part that all throughout high school it was kind of a nagging feeling like, why did I do that, you know? I mean, I really should've done a little bit more, and then it came to be, you know, the senior year, and you're supposed to take the SAT and start getting ready to apply to college. And the group of kids, the guys and the people I ran with, were not necessarily goin' on to college. I think I might have been the only--there was one or two of us that went on to college at all, and the night before the SAT I was out with a group of my friends, and they managed to convince me--so this is sort of peer pressure--they managed to convince that the best way to prepare for the SAT is to stay out late and not get very much sleep and some other activities, too, that probably are not relevant, but the net effect was the next morning I was, as you know, they give the SAT on a Saturday morning at 8 o'clock. I mean, this was, I mean, in my world, you know, I was a surfer in Santa Cruz. This was not on the radar screen of possibilities, and, of course, unfortunately, I did not set my alarm, and I woke up at 5 to 8, and the test was gonna start at 8. So that pretty much sealed the deal, no SAT. So I didn't apply anywhere.

Then summer came along, and the end of summer was there, and I had to decide to do something. So 3 days before the fall semester was gonna start at Cabrillo Community College, I walked in. I registered. So 3 days before, what kind of a choice do you have for classes? So I had creative writing at 8 o'clock in the morning. I mean, nobody wanted that. I had an art class. I mean, I had some really cool things, but I had what was left with 3 days to go. Now, I made one good decision, which was to enroll in the associate arts transfer program, which was, as you're familiar with, the master plan, at least the way it used to function. You could enroll in the community college, go 2 years of general Ed undergraduate work and transfer, and, lo and behold, I kind of managed to get my act together, and by the end of 2 years I was able apply to and transfer to Berkeley, which, by the way, I don't think I would get admitted there now, but I got admitted there then. And I ended up spending 4 more years in Berkeley, so I was on the 6-year plan, and so after Berkeley then I--so I was kind of a success product of the master plan, and not everyone has that kind of an option and opportunity anymore. I was able to make mistakes is really what I'm tryin' to say. I was able not to do everything right and still manage to get through.

You know, my contention is it's much more difficult now for students to make the kinds of mistakes I made and still move on into the postsecondary system successfully. So as I was getting out of college I started working in alternative schools, and if we could go back to the PowerPoint. So this is me and a few of my students getting ready to--it was a public alternative school, and we were in trailers, of course, but, you know, I would be remiss if I didn't at least show you one picture of me while I was at Berkeley in the late '60s, so I am so glad I let my hair grow when I did, you know? I mean, I'm sure you have a few of those pictures around

somewhere that don't see the light of day. Okay, so really the kind of question that I start with in my research, that started my research in college and career readiness, was, what do students need to know? And some of my first studies I did a proficiency-based admission standard system for the Oregon University system, where in the 1990s we were a little ahead of our time, and then I developed standards for success for the Association of American Universities, which was the first set of college readiness standards in the U.S. But to get us started, I think I'd like to share with you a couple other little examples of what students know. This is a map of the U.S. drawn by a student in Great Britain, and if you take a look at it it's really pretty good, isn't it? I mean, this is better than a lot of U.S. students.

Okay, there's a few problems, you know? You've got Big Scotland up there with polar bears. They don't know how to spell Mississippi. They know it has a lot of S's in it. There's North Dakota, South Dakota and further South Dakota, but, I mean, some of us kind of think that way, too. But, by and large, for a student from England this is pretty good, you know? Okay, but here's another student from England, and you notice here a few more problems. You've got New York State, and then New York is 1 of these 11 states, and then there's New Hampshire somewhere there takin' up most of the south. You've got Texas for digital conferences and guns. They did get California right. I want you to see that, but they did not have any idea what Oregon was, which is where I come from, and they put Canada there. They kinda squeezed it in. They know Alaska, too, and their view of the Midwest is similar to the other students. You have empty void farm land and then Detroit, which I'm not quite sure how you get to that, and they have North Utah and South Utah, so I think there's something about they know there's north and south states in the U.S. of some sort. And then there's a pole part called no clue. But they got a few right. It's kind of interesting. So I think we do--and then I like their little apology, "I'm so sorry." I think the British are very polite.

So I wanna just give you another example of kind of what our students know and how they think, but this is about the communication skills of college students. We had some postsecondary folks in the audience, didn't we? See if this rings true for you at all. These are from actual e-mails of college students, and "The Chronicle" I read periodically put some of these on there, and so here's a few examples of college student communication skills. "Dear Professor, I saw that I lost points in the lab for questions I left blank. I thought they were rhetorical questions. Can I answer them now and get the points back?"

Now this is a student who wrote to complain about a small glitch that occurred in an online quiz that was occurring at 8 in the morning and said, "I had to leave an open keg for this." Now that's a very candid type of a reason to complain, I think, but-- "I just did not expect the first test to be that hard. I did not even buy the book, so I hadn't read the chapters." I mean, now to put that as your excuse, I mean, that's what I think is an interesting view of the world. Okay, and then the last one, the subject of a student's e-mail was, "Proof this paper before you grade it, please." And then what they're saying here is, "I attached a Word file. Feel free to make your corrections in the Word document and save it, and attach it, and e-mail back to me. Thanks." Now you gotta give him credit for industriousness here, you know? Please rewrite my paper for me. Send it to me. I'll resubmit it, and you can grade it.

One more, and this is a picture--I'm gonna show you a picture in a moment. It's a picture I took outside of a middle school in Eugene when I had come back from a visit there one day, and I don't this was done ironically, although if it had been I think it would've been brilliant. "School sucks," but, you know, you really gotta kind of get the spelling right, I think, for this to work. Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of layers to this one. Alright, well, I think it is worth thinkin' about what students know and what does it mean to be college and career ready, so let me kind of

shift gears here a bit and offer you a definition of what it means to be college and career ready. This is a little different than even what I have in the book, but it goes a little bit beyond it, and it captures some of what was in the video as well, that a college and career ready student possesses several things, content knowledge, strategy skills, and techniques necessary to be successful in a postsecondary setting. And you notice how that's inclusive of a wide variety of possible postsecondary futures, but it's more than content knowledge, and that theme's gonna come up over and over again.

Now here's one that will kind of throw people a little bit. Not every student needs exactly the same knowledge and skills to be college and career ready. And I worked on the common course state standards. I co-chaired the validation committee that reviewed them. My research was used in parts to help inform it, so I'm not really saying that we shouldn't have a common set of standards. What I'm saying is that a lot of other research we've done really reinforces the notion that different people need different profiles of skills and knowledge based on their interests and the future that they wanna pursue. So a student's college and career interests help identify the precise knowledge and skills students need. So this is kind of a good news, bad news message in a sense. It's good news in the sense that more students can be college and career ready if we have some idea of what they wanna do with their lives beyond high school and if they have some idea of what they wanna do with their lives beyond high school. If all we're saying is everybody's gotta reach a certain cut score on a test and we find out that much of what's on that test isn't necessarily prerequisite for the future that they're pursuing at that point, we shouldn't stop the student at that point. Now they should be a sufficiently grounded learner. They should be sufficiently capable to keep learning throughout their lives, but we need to be careful about what barriers we put in front of students in terms of their ability to move into postsecondary education and begin work there. And what we find as students move into higher Ed, very often they mature. They develop new skills. They can make up for some of their deficiencies, not tremendously. If they're simply lacking in knowledge they won't be able to succeed, but we're learning a lot more about what it takes to be successful in entry-level college courses across the career spectrum in terms of certificate programs and general education. So, as I noted, this definition has a wide range of postsecondary options, and we don't get to college and career ready for all unless we entertain a wide option. And I think it's been kind of a stumbling block for some folks to say, "Are we talking about all students going to college?"

And then, of course, that gets very quickly inflated to, "Are we talkin' all students going to USC or to Stanford or to Berkeley?" And it's not what we're talking about. We're talking about all students continuing to learn beyond high school in a formal setting. Post high school learning is gonna be absolutely critical, and for most young people it's going to mean immediately after high school, not 5 years or 10 years after. So that's kind of the change. This definition focuses more on success than on lack of remediation. The book talks about lack of remediation, and that quote is in the handout that you have.

But what I'm trying to do is think of college readiness as a positive, not just as a lack of something, and it's what you have, not just what you lack. And when we focus on remediation, very often we're focusing on what students don't have, and I'd like to make sure we start by looking at what they do have, what they do know, what they can do. And the other thing is I think remediation is about to undergo a rapid and profound redesign in which we start to become more sophisticated about matching the student's knowledge and skill needs with the resources and the interventions and the supports that we provide to them. Well, this definition validates student interest and goals as useful reference points for individual student readiness. So right here we're starting to invite the student into the process. We're starting to say to the

student, "You are part of the solution. It's necessary for you to contribute, to engage, to think, to process, to dream." And therefore this definition puts students at the center. Now you can use the definition to come up with a frame for teaching practices and for all sorts of other things, and I'm gonna do that as we go along, but it is different than a lot of policy definitions, and I wanna make sure that the student is at the center. None of this is going to work unless we have students buying into it. I mean, we need educators buying into it as well. We need parents buying in, but if you think about a lot of the kind of learning that goes on in schooling, it tends to be what I call compliance-based learning. In other words, students show up, and they do basically what they're told. I mean, some college students aren't a whole lot different either, but, I mean, even my graduate students. I'll give 'em an assignment, and it'll be this fantastic, complex assignment, and you have to do all these really interesting things, and, you know, you really have to think and process and da, da, da, and what's the first question I get? "How many pages does it have to be?" You know? And that's a reasonable question, but we wanna make sure that there is a component of learning that is based on engagement first and foremost.

And I spent 20 years working in public schools, in Berkeley, in Oakland, in Colorado, and as a teacher, as a building-level administrator, and as a central office administrator, and then in a state education department, you know? And, I mean, I learn from that experience sort of the importance and the power and the need to engage students, particularly at those alternative schools I was talking to you about when I worked in two different alternative schools. Those students basically, they just sized you up on whether or not they were gonna respect you, and it didn't matter about the standards. It didn't matter about the tests. It didn't matter about--they were gonna learn because of you or not learn because of you, and you point out to them they're punishing themselves, they didn't care. I mean, it was a personal contract, and it taught me the importance of finding out something about them. If I didn't know anything about them, it just wasn't gonna work. Even though, you know, movies like, "To Sir With Love," you know--anybody remember that one? It's been a long time.

Okay, you know, you can't just go in there and, you know, sort of with a dent of your personality get everyone to learn in some charismatic model. You've gotta know something about the students, and I'm gonna come back to this in a couple places, but I really wanna start, you know, in the early on and emphasize that we don't gather a lot of systematic information about students' aspirations and interests. We gather a lot about their reading and writing and math skills. We don't know anything nearly as much about what they aspire to, and if they don't aspire to anything, why in the world would they do more than the minimum? If the common core state standards really represent a higher set of expectations, why would students do that if they're already working about as hard as we can get 'em to work? Well, one way is that by dent of the teacher's personality, which I just said is a very difficult way to do it. The other is if the students themselves see some reason to put more into their education. And some of the elements that are in the standards I think aren't gonna work at all unless the student is processing cognitively at a much deeper level, so that's the heart of this challenge. And why putting students at the center is not a sentimental activity or an idealistic one, it's absolutely crucial to success of the enterprise.

So what does it take then for students to be college and career ready? The model I've developed--and I'm gonna spend a few minutes talking about how I developed the model, so you have some sense of where it came from because it is entirely research based, and also it's been thoroughly embedded and practiced in the field--has four basic components to it, key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, key learning skills and techniques, and key transition knowledge and skills. And just for simplicity's sake, we talk about think, know, act, go, the idea that students need thinking skills, they need content knowledge, they need a set of

learning skills to actualize all of that, and then they need to know how to go from high school to college.

So I'm gonna put up a slide now that goes into more detail, but I don't expect you to absorb everything I'm gonna show you here. I'm gonna spend a little time going through these, but this is the deeper specification of the model, and it has 42 components to it. Anybody here familiar with "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"? What's the significance of 42? "Life, the universe, and everything," so this kind of worked out okay coming up at 42. But the idea here is that you can take college and career readiness and make it actionable.

Now there's things that aren't up there, right? I mean, you don't see financial aid there or parental education level, which we know are important variables, right? We know that the parental indication level and the financial capabilities of parents are important variables in students going on to college, but why isn't it in the model? Because it's not actionable by schools. You can't really change parental income levels unless you've got a program I don't know about that we should hear about that one. So this is what schools can do, and if you take a look at it you'll see a lot of this are things that schools do in fits and starts in bits and pieces for some students, maybe not for all students, and in somewhat more formal ways and somewhat more informal ways. A lot of times individual teachers are doing elements of this, but the school as a system is not in a coordinated fashion developing these skills. So what happens is, for students, their education over time, the haul is not necessarily even equal to, let alone greater than, the sum of the parts. Here, by specifying the parts, we can try to create a synergistic whole where these really lead to their development and the maturation of a young person who can successfully pursue the challenges of postsecondary education in a wide range of environments."

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