TRANSCRIPT

Title: David Conley Part 3

We need to have students have the mindset to achieve their goals, and a lot of that really is helping them understand that it's not in their best interests to fail the class just to teach the teacher a lesson. You know, it's back to that alternative school population of kids who I worked with, and many others, that they have to take--we need time and opportunity to talk with students in class about what it takes to be successful and about owning their education, and persisting and not giving up. And having some things that don't come easily. You know, what has happened, and I think there's been a lot of pressure to move everything down to where it comes easily, and people think that that somehow is a reflection of standards-based education.

I don't personally think that's really what it means. I think having all students be successful really means having students be challenged and then supported and scaffolded when necessary to be successful, but with the right level of challenge. Monitoring their performance, knowing how well they're doing and being able to gauge their skills, asking for help. What's really interesting is low-achieving students are the worst at asking for help, and in college, students from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds are least likely to take advantage of the help colleges have to offer, and a lot of times the help is specifically supposed to be designed for students from those backgrounds. A lot of reasons why. We could talk about it.

It's nothing, I mean, it's not a knock on those students. It's a very difficult, complex psychological set of factors for students who come into an institution and do not want to feel like they're not capable of succeeding, or who may not have a lot of skill and experience working with complex bureaucratic structures, so there needs to be a different mindset here, as well as the institution needing to reach out more to the students. And then demonstrating self-efficacy. Learning how to control what you can control, and then controlling the things you can control. So on the transition parts, and this is the fourth of the four keys, the U.S. leads the world in the complexity of transitioning to college. First-generation college attendees are at a much greater disadvantage, and school is the only place that they can get access to necessary privileged knowledge. I talked about my youngest daughter. We had three daughters.

The first one, you know, did fine in high school, and, you know, my wife and I, even though I work in this area, it still was new to us. So I don't know, how many of you have kind of had that experience with a first-born, where you had to kind of figure out the system as you went along. And she did okay. She got to college and graduated and she did fine. The second, we were a little more confident. Got some scholarships. Went pretty smoothly. By the time we got to the third one, we got a little bit cocky, you know? "Hey, we know what we're doing here." So my wife, in working with my daughter, they applied to nine schools and she got into seven, and she ended up attending MIT, you know? So she didn't become the engineer, the computational engineer, but got a degree in brain and cognitive science. So that was all good.

But think about that model. I mean, what does it take for--if that becomes our policy model to get students into college, then we really need people to have more children, and I'm not sure that we can legislate that one too well. But also think about all the experimenting we do on

first-borns. Got any first-borns in the audience? I'm one. So how many of you got experimented on by your parents, and then they figured it out about two or three kids down the line? You know, it is a system that is knowledge-intensive. Students have to know what the options are, how they apply and enroll, how to afford it, what the behavioral norms are for college, and how to advocate for themselves in college, what their identity is as a college student.

These are incredibly difficult for middle- to upper middle-class students, and they're totally impossible for first-generation, lower income, students from ethnic-minority backgrounds who have no experience with a system that is insanely complicated. I gave you my little story. There's a million like it. I think in this room, some of you have struggled, maybe had some of the first-generation syndrome, where it just was all foreign to you. Some of you succeeded, I think, probably had some supports in getting over some of those hurdles.

Equity is about making the playing field a lot more level for more people, and I think this only way we can do it is if our post-secondary partners work with our secondary and elementary partners to simplify and rationalize the system, make it more transparent and clear, and if the schools do more to provide information to students and their parents at an earlier age, and I'll talk a little bit more about that later.

Okay, so those are the four keys. I'm gonna review 'em for you. I'm gonna talk to you in very general terms about what it's like to try to assess some of this. So remember, key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, key learning skills and techniques, key transition knowledge and skills. So if you're completely college-ready, that's where you are in this Venn diagram, right? That's pretty daunting, isn't it, thinking about that? So what do we know about where students stand in terms of their readiness? Well, this is what we measure right now. We measure repeatedly, we measure it in a redundant fashion, we measure it over and over again. It's not a bad thing to know.

It's a good thing to know, but that's it. We get a little bit of this overlap between the content knowledge and the cognitive strategies, and there's some kind of indirect measures for that, and you know, occasionally we'll give an assignment that'll go a little bit more that direction. What we're left with is two areas that are entirely unmeasured, learning skills and techniques and the key transition knowledge and skills, and one, the key cognitive strategies, that is under-measured. Students get no feedback on anything except the content knowledge, and what's really been interesting to me is how sophisticated the testing of content knowledge has gotten, and how little student performance has improved. Why? Have we ever asked ourselves? If you get information about what you don't know, you don't know why you didn't know it. I mean, you have to figure out how to learn it differently. I'm gonna give you one more story.

I was an assistant superintendent in Fort Collins, Colorado. I'm not picking on Fort Collins, but my first year I was there, one of the things I was in charge of was summer school. So I went to Fort Collins High School and what we did is we centralized the summer schools in a couple schools. And so in this classroom at Fort Collins High School was the summer school, and we had in that classroom all the students who had not done well in that class during the year. We brought them all together in one classroom, students who had not done well, didn't understand it, didn't finish it, whatever. Now, right off the bat, do you see a problem with that model? The second thing we did was we got a teacher in there who was a perfectly capable and competent person, but I don't think that was the highest priority for her in her life was spending her summer in that classroom. I mean, she did a good job, but we didn't have the most motivated teacher in the world necessarily.

And the third thing we did is we used the same materials, the same books, the same assignments that we had before. And the fourth thing we did is we did not have any air-conditioning, which I thought that was brilliant, just brilliant.

You know, I think Einstein gets credited for the quote that's saying that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. Well, we were doing insanity there. Those students were not learning anything about how to learn. They weren't learning how to engage in that subject in a different fashion to be successful, and I just think that's kind of inexcusable. We've gotta be developing learning skills and techniques. We've gotta be preparing students with higher expectations, higher aspirations, higher goals, more learning skills and techniques, so that they can engage in that development of those cognitive strategies, and through that, really deepen their understanding of content knowledge.

I'm gonna jump over the part on assessment here. This particular document, "Creating Systems of Assessments for Deeper Learning," is free. I would say Google it, because I think we have it on our website, but I think it's elsewhere. My point here is that an assessment system, which is what we have now, provides the least amount of information needed to make as many decisions as technically feasible or politically necessary at the lowest possible cost. Have you ever heard legislators talk about assessment systems? This is how they talk about them, "What's the least information we can have to make the most decisions possible at the least cost?" Education's the only place in society where people are talking like that. I mean, how many of you really want to go to a doctor who says, "Hey, what's the least amount of information I can get about you and see what's wrong with you?" I mean, most of you say, "What's the most information you can get so that you can rule things out and make sure you've got the right diagnosis?"

A system of assessments, by contrast, provides as much information as possible to inform learners, the focal point is the learner, of their standing in relation to their aspirations, and to facilitate student-centered decisions about their readiness. It's still good to use for grades. It's still good to use for graduation. It's still good to use for college applications and for college admission, but we focused the system so that at least the information is usable to students, and they have some reason to act upon it. That's what I meant about student-centered. There's a range of assessments. I'm not gonna spend any time at all on this, except to say most of what we do is measure parts and pieces, and we should do that. We should measure parts and pieces. This is not an either/or. This is a continuum, not an either/or. Let's keep measuring parts and pieces, but let's just make sure we measure more than parts and pieces. Let's do some measuring of the big picture, because in reality, you integrate knowledge and skill and use it in a dynamic fashion.

I'd say let's think about profiles containing information from multiple sources about multiple facets of readiness, information on more than just one of the four keys, and information that's actionable by students. The other thing we want to try to do is move students from being novice learners to expert learners. And this, interestingly enough, doesn't happen very often.

But just very quickly here, anybody here ever teach anyone to drive, by the way? Okay, how's a novice driver any different from an expert driver? Anyone want to call out something that comes to mind? Their confidence. What else? Experience. What does a novice driver do when they're confronted with a situation that does not conform to exactly what they've been taught before? They can follow the rules and still end up causing a disaster. Experts are people who understand what the rules are, but know what the aim is they're trying to accomplish, and can

actually kind of bend or break the rules to accomplish the aim or the end. Novices follow rules.

What's really interesting to me, when I really looked at this, is the progression from middle school through high school is through content knowledge in which the learner remains a novice learner at each level. Students in the highest classes, very often, like in a calculus class, are still learning mathematics exactly the same way they learned it when they were learning Algebra I. As learners, they haven't progressed. In science classes, I think it's the same thing. It's largely there's a nomenclature component to it. There may be a testing or demonstration component, but we haven't moved them along in terms of scientific inquiry and thinking. We haven't moved them towards a more expert level of being scientists.

What we need to do is move students up the level as they progress from high school, or through school, from novices toward emerging strategic thinkers. If we can get 'em that far, that's a tremendous accomplishment, because we haven't assessed--EPIC developed an assessment system, gave it to over 40,000 students. We still use it. It's made up of performance tasks that are complex, so, they're like research problems that you would do. And they take, you know, several periods to do, and you have to write out a response. They're graded on a rubric that gets at all of this, and guess what? Almost all students are novice or emerging novice, almost all. Even, you know, totally independent of the grades they're getting in the class, when you give 'em a complex problem, almost all students at all levels, I mean, all the way through high school, novice, emerging novice. Our students are doing what we tell 'em to do, but they are not engaging more deeply. You can develop strategic thinking, and we can talk about how to do that at another time, but the kind of things you look for are insight. Are they showing understanding of what they're doing, or deeper understanding? Efficiency. Are they using the right methods to complete a complex task? Idea generation. Is there any original thinking at all occurring? Concept formation. Is their thinking linear or is it conceptual? Do you see them combining things into larger constellations? Integration. Does the piece or the paper have multiple parts that hang together, or is it just piece, part, piece, part with kind of no connective tissue to show that there's a flow and connection? And then solution seeking. Are they able to seek the solution that the problem causes them to need to complete it?

All right, I'm gonna go a couple minutes over, but not too long. I just want you to know, I'm aware of the time. I'm not gonna go too long, but just a couple minutes. I do want to just show you this contrast between a good assignment and the same assignment with strategic thinking. "Natural disasters affect people and society. Identify a natural disaster and describe its effect on civilization, historically and in the present. Be sure to describe the ways this natural disaster disrupts the economy and people's lives. List three things that could be done to lessen the effects of this type of natural disaster in the future. Tell whether you agree or disagree with these types of ways to reduce the impact." Most of you would think, I mean, that's a decent assignment.

Okay, to make it something that has strategic thinking, the difference here--basically, you can take a look at this. The difference here is that the students have to basically "formulate the problem by identifying strategies humans could adopt to deal with natural disasters," and they have to "conclude with a discussion of your observation about the relationship between human society and natural disasters." This is not one clear set of procedures. This is an open-ended task that takes you in a variety of directions to complete, and you have to engage in it much more. So they're both good.

This one is very structured. You follow the steps and the procedures and you complete it. This one is a framework and you have to make many more decisions about what goes on within it.

Okay, implementing the four keys. You're already doing a lot of things right. I've looked at a lot of the material from your districts and I've talked with your kind of education folks, and I know you're doing a lot of things right. You offer challenging classes. You provide quality instructional materials. You hire and retain highly qualified teachers. You encourage students to set high goals, use data on student performance, and institute school-wide improvement programs. But I think there's still a few more things that you could do. I think by now it should be clear, I think you can learn more about your students. Know something about their interests, their aspirations, and their goals. Incorporate opportunities in assignments to explore interests, and understand their attitude toward learning. Why are they succeeding and why aren't they succeeding?

AVID courses, if you're familiar with AVID, have some elements of this. We're trying to work with AVID to build more of this into it, but reflective learners are really key to moving students toward greater ownership of learning, and then higher cognitive engagement. Develop those cognitive strategies I talked about. Take a look at the challenge level of assignments that are given, and see what level of cognitive complexity they're occurring at. Are they basically requiring declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, conditional knowledge, or conceptual knowledge? It's okay to have declarative knowledge assignments, as long as not everything is declarative. It's okay to have procedural knowledge assignments, where you're just kind of following directions, as long as it's not everything is procedural. It's okay to have some-- everything doesn't have to be conditional or conceptual, but some of it has to be. Some of it has to reach that level. Take a look at how often an assignment requires students to generate a hypothesis or gather source material or interpret contradictory information, or work on a problem that requires more than just following directions.

Teach foundational learning skills at all grade levels. Academic vocabulary is incredibly important. It should be taught from preschool on. It's the words that are used in classrooms, in schooling, you know, "classify, interpret, hypothesize, parse." There is a vocabulary here that I find a lot of college students haven't mastered, and it is tremendously challenging for those students if they haven't figured out what those things mean. These can be taught in elementary school. The list exists, but it's gotta be contextualized in a meaningful activity where you use it, not a list.

Let's teach learning skills and techniques to all students. Let's teach 'em how to organize. You know, how many students do you know who just, their problem is they are so profoundly disorganized that they can't follow what's going on? We don't even know what they know, 'cause they can't organize themselves. They can't manage their time. They can't study. They don't know how to seek help. They will not persist. I'm not saying you have to become people's parents, but I'm saying in the case values can be built into every class in every school and every year, and the students will get a little better going along. You will pound it into them, and that's okay. And then help them improve speaking and listening.

Certainly for our English language learners, we need way more opportunities for them to demonstrate, not just in an ELL class, but in regular classes, the use of English language. And also for students who are not ELL students, but who are maybe challenged in their writing skills, to have opportunities to speak helps them to develop their thinking and can precede their writing. I have just seen students who struggle with formal writing who were brilliant when you've got them talking. They just totally blew my mind. I mean, they are so much more articulate than I ever was, and they had so much more to say about their lives. I mean, we need to have that as a legitimate part of their experience as a way to validate them as being competent and capable in one area, and then piggyback off of that to develop the literacy

skills. Increase access to "privileged knowledge."

More information about college choice, application, financial processes. Having all students take a default course schedule that makes them college-eligible. I think that's kind of a low bar, but I think it's a starting point. Get them on to college campuses early. I think we got a lot of post-secondary folks in the room here. Finding ways to get them on to college campuses is important. I gotta say, sometimes I worry a little bit when I see the tours going around the University of Oregon, and all of a sudden I see all the high school kids in the video game room. I get a little worried about what they think college is gonna be, but I think we need meaningful connections between high school and colleges, where students go to colleges, see what the courses are like, see what instructors are like, see what the experience is like, and guess what?

Students really get excited by that, in our experience, is that a lot of young people just don't know what a college--and by the way, you probably know this at one level, but, you know, Mike Kirst and Andrea Venezia did some research on this, and I've done some work in it. When you ask students about college, most of them don't know the difference between a community college and a 4-year institution. They don't know. They don't know the difference in the tuition between them, between a community college, a 4-year institution, and Harvard.

And you know, the media doesn't do us any favors. They put the, you know, tuition at $50,000 a year. That figure, if you ask a lot of people, they think that's what college costs. They don't know community college is less expensive. There's a lot of misunderstandings at all levels. A lot of evidence that dual and concurrent enrollment courses are important, that some sort of a college-level course before you get to college is important. AP would go into that category, international baccalaureate. Assignments that have students research various aspects of college. You can build that into classes, where they're actually doing some research about colleges, not with the counselors, but in an English class or a social science type of class. Have all students prepare a practice college admission form in 10th and 11th grade.

And then finally, I think we've gotta have them redesign courses to align better with college and career readiness. That's an experience that I think--so part of this has been on the student. Now I think part of it is on the high schools and middle schools as well. So make sure that you've got quality syllabi, that there's a progression of standards across course sequences, that key skills like writing and reading complex materials are present in all courses, and that college instructors can work with high school teachers on mutual improvement of syllabi, mutual. In the state of South Carolina, we've been doing this for 5 years, mutually, where each--they both make changes.

Okay, what about the Common Core? I just want to make the connection for you that the Common Core aligns well with college and career readiness. But students are going to need the content that's in the Common Core, and we've demonstrated that that content, you know, from a research point of view, it's in college courses and in career courses, so it's important. My suggestion to you is use the Common Core as a framework for developing the four keys, not as an end in itself, but as the vehicle to develop this broader sense of college and career readiness, so that you do not lose all of these important factors to the service of just developing the English and the math skills alone. I think this needs to be done contextually, where the Common Core is a means to this broader notion of college and career readiness.

I'm gonna close with two slides that I think are really powerful. I'd like you to kind of think about these, and maybe have your students think about 'em. This is what happened in the U.S.

during the recession, and it's the jobless recovery, as we call it. The green line is people with a Bachelor's degree or better, the red line is people with Associate's degree or some college, and the blue line is people with high school diploma or less. And what you will see here is that for people with college degrees actually gained 160,000 jobs during the recession, and have added 2 million jobs in the recovery. For students with an Associate's degree or some college, you'll see that they lost 1.75 million jobs, but they've gained 1.6 million back. But what happened here? Students with a high school diploma or less lost 5.6 million jobs, and have lost an additional 250,000 jobs. This is where this recession hit, and this is--I think the most important lesson we can take away from this is students who do not have college-level skills are going to be affected by every subsequent economic downturn in just this way. Here's the other slide I wanted to show you.

In the upper right-hand corner, the blue line is the unemployment rate and the red line is the labor force participation rate. Normally what happens is as unemployment goes down, labor force participation goes up, right? Unemployment goes down, participation goes up. More and more people are participating. Here's what happened this time. For the first time, labor force participation is decreasing at the same time unemployment rate is decreasing. Meaning, as the rate goes down, those people are not getting jobs. Those people with high school diploma or less are not reentering the labor force. This is unprecedented. We are creating a class of people who will become a perpetual underclass unless something happens for them, and the only thing that can happen is education. That's the only way out. For those people already who are adults, it's the only way out for the young people who you deal with who are still in school and thinking of leaving for one reason or another. They must stay. An education that prepares students for college is no longer a luxury. It's a necessity. All of your students need to be able to keep learning beyond high school if they are to be successful in their lives. Thank you.

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