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Notes on this Issue

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Notes on this Issue

Abstract

With these newest contributions in research, practices from the field, and perspectives, this issue marks five years of publication of the journal, *Learning Communities Research Practice* and the goal that it would extend the important work of informing practice and enfranchising knowledge-making by practitioners and researchers in the field.

In June 2013, in the second issue of *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, the first issue containing articles written specifically for the new on-line publication, the introduction argued that the goal of the journal was to “bring coherence to the rich and interesting work happening across campuses.”¹ Through the journal, we aimed to help shape the field of knowledge that corresponds with the rapid growth in learning community practice.

We were guided in our efforts by the work of Stephen North (1987), whose seminal book, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, made a similar argument for composition studies. The rapid growth of composition led to a corresponding field of knowledge, North argued, in which scholars and researchers were not always reflective about their chosen modes of inquiry. Moreover, he wrote, new studies tended to “trample roughshod over the claims of previous inquirers,” particularly classroom teachers, so that “despite their overwhelming majority, they have been effectively disenfranchised as knowledge-makers in their own field” (p. 3).

Five years later, the journal seems to be serving the primary purpose we aimed for: to enfranchise knowledge-making by practitioners and researchers in ways that would further inform practice. In that way, the journal has been helping to bring coherence to the “rich and interesting work happening across campuses.” The articles in this issue readily support that claim.

In their research article, “Learning Community Coordinator Efforts to Address Students with Potential Psychiatric/Psychological Disabilities,” Mimi Benjamin and Holley A. Belch (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) report findings from their qualitative study involving learning community coordinators at six campuses in the form of strategies, successes, challenges, and recommendations. Their study is distinctive in its focus both on students with potential psychiatric/psychological disabilities and on learning community coordinator efforts.

In “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks: Using a Common Read to Transform a Learning Community,” Emily Virtue (Clemson University) and Gayle Wells, Carol MacKusick, Amy Murphy-Nugen, Amy Rose, and Melissa M. Snyder (Western Carolina University) report on a study they designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a common intellectual experience for first-year students in a year-long learning community. Their examination of the effectiveness of a high impact practice (HIP) within a HIP is instructive as programs across the country work on similar HIP integrations. Moreover, the common reading was intended to increase students’ understanding of diversity, their critical thinking and deep learning, and their knowledge of scientific concepts.

“Constructing a Complex Learning Community Index—Operationalizing the Concept of a Learning Community into a Measurable Construct,” by Kevin S. Marshall (University of La Verne College of Law) and Joseph Cabrera and Kathleen Weaver (University of La Verne), presents the results of a research study grounded in complexity theory. The authors designed survey instruments to measure the presence and magnitude of spatial differentiation, integration, and feedback learning loops within La Verne’s first year learning communities. As they report, findings from their study can be used to “inspire conversation and strategic design with respect to specific learning community design and delivery.”

“Community Resonance: Indigenous Epistemology and the Learning Community Program at the University of Hawai’i West O’ahu,” by Masahide T. Kato (University of Hawai’i at West O’ahu), describes a learning community designed for Native Hawaiian students and inclusive of both Native and non-Native Hawaiian students. Everyone one in the learning community—students, staff, and faculty—was immersed in a Hawaiian world view, grounded in resonant connections between body, mind, soul, and spirit, and between humans and nature.

¹ Washington Center Editorial Team (2013). Making Knowledge to Strengthen Our Field. *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, 1(2), Article 1. Available at: <https://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrjournal/vol1/iss2/1>

“To Have and to Hold: Reflections of an Interim Director,” by Lisa M. Hibl (University of Southern Maine), provides a perspective on the challenging task of serving as the interim director for a long-standing learning community program, where neither the choice to simply maintain the status quo nor the choice to make significant change is viable. In that complex moment, Hibl, writes, an interim director needs to “seek instead a poised balance by understanding the LLC as a microcosm of the larger university—as its own world—through the voices of the students.”

In “Learning Communities: Opportunities for the Retention of Faculty of Color,” Judy A. Loveless-Morris and Latoya S. Reid (Tacoma Community College) offer a compelling and urgent argument that the experience of teaching in a learning community can help ameliorate barriers faced by faculty of color (FOC) at predominantly white institutions. In particular, Loveless-Morris and Reid explain that “teaching in a paired learning community allowed us to effectively address issues related to tokenism, isolation, mentorship, and marginalization of scholarship efforts that are widely discussed in the literature about the experiences of FOC.”

With this issue, I am turning the editorship of the journal over to Dr. Janine Graziano King and Dr. Gabriella Kahn, contributors to the journal and learning community faculty at Kingsborough Community College. It’s bittersweet. I have welcomed and learned from the opportunities to read and respond to your ideas about learning community work. I have had the pleasure of working with committed reviewers who generously share their expertise and the dedicated staff who bring the journal to print, including Dr. Lynn Dunlap, faculty emeritus, Skagit Valley College; Rachel Homchick, Washington Center; and Sara Huntington, Evergreen State College. However as faculty know, the most effective vice-presidents of instruction give their best time and energy to the faculty and students on their own campuses. As administrators know, no matter how many resolutions we make about managing time more effectively, at the end of the day there are only 24 hours. I look forward to remaining an active reader, and wish you all well as you continue the wonderful work you do building community with and for students and each other.

References

North, Stephen. (1987). *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.