

6-6-2019

Notes for this Issue

Gabrielle Kahn
gmk160@gmail.com

Janine Graziano
Kingsborough Community College, janinegk@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Kahn, G. , Graziano, J. (). Notes for this Issue. *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, 7(1), Article 1.
Available at: <https://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrjournal/vol7/iss1/1>

Authors retain copyright of their material under a [Creative Commons Non-Commercial Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

Notes for this Issue

Abstract

From the design of learning community programs to the creation of learning community assignments, being intentional—understanding who our students are and staying focused on their needs and goals—is how we do learning communities well.

Keywords

intention, intentional, intentionality

Learning communities are intended to make connections, and their basic design reflects that intention. Here at *LCRP*, we use the Learning Communities Association's definition of learning communities, understanding our work to involve "the integration of engaged curricular and co-curricular learning" that aims to promote "relationship and community building among faculty or staff and a cohort of students in a rich learning environment." As Lardner and Malnarich (2008) remind us, this work is highly dynamic and complex. Calling for a "pedagogy of intentional integration," they point to the importance of purposefulness in our work as learning community practitioners—not only in how we design the structures of our linked programs, but also in how we attend to day-to-day teaching and learning activities in our classrooms. By carefully considering, from administrative and pedagogical perspectives, the particular needs of the populations we serve and how we might best meet these needs, we are better equipped to create for students collaborative "deep learning" experiences that are relevant to living in a "complex, messy, diverse world" (p. 1). All of the articles in this issue point to intentionality as a foundational element of our shared mission to do learning communities well.

In *The Critical Nature of Intentionality When Supporting Academically Underprepared Students Through Learning Communities*, Richard Gebauer discusses how learning communities can offer support for developmental student populations, but only if four key features are intentionally implemented. We often associate these features—integrative learning, collaborative classrooms, co-curricular support, and faculty-student interaction—with learning community programs, but Gebauer argues that they are especially critical when considering the needs of developmental students, who often come to college not only underprepared, but also full of self-doubt. By taking care to ensure that these key features are implemented and sustained, Gebauer sees the increased potential for learning communities to promote developmental students' success.

Jason VanOra, looking at this same population in *The Impact of Learning Communities on the Experiences of Developmental Students in Community College: A Qualitative Study*, interviewed students in a learning community that linked a developmental reading and writing course with psychology and a first-year seminar. The students reported a number of positive aspects of their learning community experience—including an active and engaging pedagogy, access to a supportive social and intellectual community, and opportunities for interdisciplinary thinking. Students found the learning community experience to be challenging in certain ways as well, prompting VanOra, based on his findings, to make suggestions for how practitioners might be more intentional about implementing learning communities for developmental students.

Students who travel from densely populated areas to study at rural colleges can often, especially in their first year, be challenged by an unexpected sense of

loneliness and isolation. Amy Spowles and her colleagues, in *Place-Based Learning Communities on a Rural Campus: Turning Challenges into Assets*, write about how they focus on their location at Humboldt State University, the ancestral land of the Native American Wiyot Tribe, to engage students and create a sense of belonging and connection. In their STEM learning communities, students learn about the history and culture of their campus through contextual interdisciplinary themes.

Intentional integration in learning communities often takes the form of one or more integrative assignments (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). In the *The Science and Art of Nursing: A Purposefully Designed Integrative Assignment*, Lydia Laucella discusses the design of an assignment for her learning community that addressed the real-world learning outcomes of nursing students. Recognizing that these outcomes included developing a critical understanding of diversity and an inquiring mind, Laucella and her teaching partner designed a multi-scaffolded integrative assignment that asked students to investigate a social, economic, or health issue affecting their local geriatric population. Through this work, students learned about becoming sensitive to the needs of a particular population and approaching their work with an open, inquiring mind.

In *Indexing: Narrating Interdisciplinary Connections in the Classroom*, Jack Mino, Elizabeth Trobaugh, Steven Winters, and James Dutcher point out that “integrative learning doesn’t just happen.” Drawing upon Barber’s (2012) three-stage model of integration, they put forth a new tool, the interdisciplinary index that points to evidence of integration in students’ work. By sharing their understanding of interdisciplinary indexing and how it is being used in learning communities on their campus, the authors provide a model for how practitioners in the field can make aspects of integration visible in concrete ways.

From the design of learning community programs to the creation of learning community assignments, being intentional—understanding who our students are and staying focused on their needs and goals—is how we do learning communities well. The articles in this issue have deepened our thinking about ways that intentionality as a concept can be realized in practice in our linked classrooms. We welcome future submissions that continue to explore what intentionality means for learning community researchers and practitioners and what it can do for our students.

Reference

- Lardner, E., & Malnarich, G. (2008). A new era in learning-community work: Why the pedagogy of intentional integration matters. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 40(4), 30-37. doi:10.3200/CHNG.40.4.30-37