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## Notes for this Issue

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### Abstract

Since the publication of our last issue, in the midst of a global pandemic, we have been forced to reenvision how we engage students in our learning communities. With time and space separating us in ways we have never before experienced, the articles in this issue all point to the need for us, in our practices, to remain steadfast in our view that individual students are empowered through their social activity. Although these articles describe work that took place before the new normal of our virtual world, we hope you are inspired to bring the understanding in these pieces of agency-through-community to your work, both now and in the future.

In learning communities, we are committed to an educational approach that is grounded in relationship building. Central to our movement is the belief that strong social ties have immense value; it is through engagement between and among students and instructors that students are empowered to do meaningful integrative work that can be applied outside of the classroom. Students' agency is therefore understood to be dynamic—not something static that students possess in isolation, but rather a participatory process that cannot be separated from the communities in which they take part (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).

Since the publication of our last issue, in the midst of a global pandemic, we have been forced to reenvision how we engage students in our learning communities. With time and space separating us in ways we have never before experienced, the articles in this issue all point to the need for us, in our practices, to remain steadfast in our view that individual students are empowered through their social activity. Although these articles describe work that took place before the new normal of our virtual world, we hope you are inspired to bring the understanding in these pieces of agency-through-community to your work, both now and in the future.

In “Preparing Learning Community Peer Mentors to Support Students' Transitions,” by Mimi Benjamin, we learn about ways that peer mentoring can strengthen our communities by attending to the mental health needs of individual students. This qualitative study examines the training experiences of peer mentors as well as the outcomes, which centered upon how the mentors observed and addressed concerning behaviors in the students they were working with. This research illuminates the whole selves that students bring to their learning experiences and encourages us to consider ways we might deepen our support of students' emotional lives so that they may become more active participants in our communities.

“Integrating High Impact Practices: A Learning Community Model to Enhance Identity Development, Civic Engagement, and Reflective Practice,” by Adrianna Guram, Stacy Cummings Onks, Bethany Novotny, and Teresa Brooks Taylor, shows us how the experiences of students in communities can become enriched when academic affairs and student affairs collaborate to create opportunities for student agency. Through their description of a pilot learning community, the authors highlight how combining numerous high impact practices, including travel study and service-learning, can both shape a community and contribute to the development of individuals through such mindful tools as self-reflection and digital storytelling.

The Perspectives piece, “The Story of Josie: From Involvement to Influence” by Josie A. Mansperger, Amy L. Morgan, Jessica E. Kiss, and Mary-Jon Ludy, takes us on a journey through Josie's own development as a student and, later, as a mentor and researcher in learning communities. The author's

hands-on experiences show us how learning communities done well can contribute to an individual's developing agency and transformation.

As you read the articles in this issue, we encourage you to think about ways you have worked to promote meaningful social activity in your learning communities during the pandemic. Our next issue, to be published in Fall of 2021, explores learning communities in the time of Covid-19. Please see our call for articles. Now more than ever, we need to be intentional and creative in our efforts to foster a community identity in the groups we work with, so that the individuals within these groups feel connected to, and grow from, a larger whole.

#### Reference

- Lantolf, J. P., & Pavlenko, A. (2001). (S)econd (L)anguage (A)ctivity theory: Understanding second language learners as people. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 141-158). Pearson Education.