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Doing LCRP: The First Year

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Abstract

This editorial provides a review of the first year of *Learning Communities Research and Practice* and the journal's potential to reconfigure our collective work.

Learning Communities Research and Practice (LCRP) is truly a field-based effort—from the editorial team to peer reviewers, writers and readers. In a year’s time, a good idea—through grit and hard work—has become volume one, issues 1, 2, and now 3. The readership far surpasses LCRP’s hard-copy predecessor: more than 700 people download articles in the month when a new issue is announced, and around 400 people do the same in non-publication months. We aim for far more but appreciate that a readership grows over time.

All of us are figuring out what it means to *do* a journal. In mind and spirit, the practice is scholarly. As Lee Shulman pointed out in the early years of re-conceptualizing teaching as scholarly activity, the minimal criteria are clear: work needs to be public, subject to critical review, and accessible for use by others. Indeed, the journal already shows signs of becoming a vehicle for doing exactly what Shulman describes.

Here’s what we’ve noticed about LCRP’s potential to re-configure our collective work.

Colleagues are using LCRP to invigorate practice. Two examples come to mind, both occurring in the same week but states apart. The first sighting was in Washington at the LC coordinators’ fall meeting at Highline Community College. The pre-reading proposed by a colleague from Washington State University was a journal article on Kingsborough Community College’s approach to faculty development (Graziano & Kahn, 2013) which describes how teaching teams are supported throughout the term at this well-known Brooklyn school. As we and others discovered, beginning a conversation on professional development with a robust and tested practice as a collective benchmark sets a higher bar for imagining possibilities. The second sighting came a few days later at the National Conference on Learning Communities in Corpus Christi. One of the preconference sessions was based on an LCRP research article about a sophomore interdisciplinary learning community at Holyoke Community College (Sandoval & Mino, 2013). The authors proposed this session so conference goers could learn how to create the kind of embodied learning activities which led to the deeper integrative learning their research documents. From New York to Washington, and from Massachusetts to Texas, “local” practice seeds growth along essential LC-field trajectories.

Colleagues are using LCRP to mentor new writers and a new generation of educators. The journal’s peer review process is an inspiring example of collegial and intergenerational coaching. Our thirty or so peer reviewers are among the most knowledgeable learning community practitioners in the country. Collectively, their specialized expertise represents a diversity of disciplines and responsibilities across every type and size of college and university. Their learning community experience is equally diverse, encompassing a range of LC program purposes and designs. Their commitment to the field is expressed in the

time each takes to craft a review. The gift of these colleagues' attentive and generative guidance is revealed by the number of manuscripts which are in the process of being revised for publication. By nurturing relationships between new practitioners and the field's founding activists and scholars, we are building the field's capacity and staying power.

Colleagues are also using LCRP to think through what from their practice may be journal-worthy. Our editorial team facilitated a session at the national conference with the enticing title, "Have you considered writing about your work?" We asked session participants to fill out a form on what they plan to write about and what they want to read. By happy coincidence, the two questions yielded lots of proposals and the following matches. On the readers' side, people want to know how to bring LCs to scale, recruit diverse students, train peer mentor staff, work with student communities of color, embed First Year Experience programs in LCs, evaluate their program's impact, and assess dimensions of LC work using multiple methods. On the writers' side, people are keen to share their experience of expanding LC programs, connecting LCs to other high impact practices, designing needs assessment for peer mentor training, developing a race-themed LC, and using assessment to improve practice. LCRP is an ideal venue for connecting pressing concerns to established research-based practice. It organizes how practical wisdom—the lessons we learn—is passed on to others.

This issue of LCRP promises to be one which prompts conversations, further inquiry, and readers' responses. In *Academic Development of First-Year Living-Learning Program Students Before and After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita of 2005*, Robert Rohli, Kurt Keppler, and Daniel Winkler from Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical School address the far-reaching impacts of storms on the academic performance of students. Their study suggests that the sense of community offered by a living-learning program can be a mitigating factor in reducing the longitudinal impacts of natural disasters, community tragedies, and personal difficulties.

The galvanizing effects of community also figure in three "practices from the field" articles. In *Building Community Partnerships with Adults with Disabilities: A Case Study Using Narrative Literacy as a Conduit for Shared Learning*, David Gordon and Cyril Ghosh report on the deeper understanding which can result when people who learn differently "connect"—in this case Wagner College students and adults with intellectual disabilities from a community organization. By contrast, Julie Watts from the University of Wisconsin-Stout discusses an emerging problem in some LC classrooms and the downside of what might be "too much" community in *Why Hyperbonding Occurs in the Learning Community Classroom and What to Do About It*. The writing team of Jean Halley, Courtney Heiserman, Victoria Felix, and Amy Eshleman

describe a very different dynamic when students are invited to become co-teachers. In *Students Teaching Students: A Method for Collaborative Learning*, they examine the use of a Student Small Group Presentation model from their vantage points as teachers, students, and teaching assistants.

As is often the case, student feedback leads to experimentation. Hilary Steiner, Michelle Dean, Stephanie Foote, and Ruth Goldfine from Kennesaw State University in *Applying TLC (a Targeted Learning Community) to Transform Teaching and Learning in Science* describe an intervention to check attrition in science classes and increase students' abilities to take charge of their learning. While LC classrooms like this one can become privileged places for introducing students to learning as a life-long endeavor, some LC experiences cultivate other enduring outcomes, as Christina McDowell Marinchak and David DeJuliis from Duquesne University discovered. In *The Learning Community Experience: Cultivating a Residual Worldview* they report on first-year learning communities which give students a narrative and philosophical or theological touchstone for appreciating the biases and presuppositions of community.

Finally, Kathy Johnson from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis makes the case in *Learning Communities and the Completion Agenda* for why LCs remain a critically important intervention in higher education given escalating demands for efficiency in degree completion. From her perspective, LCs are a preferred strategy for maintaining quality student learning while we work to increase graduation rates, especially of underrepresented students in higher education.

If we drew what it looks like to *do* LCRP, we would see constellations of networks. If we animated the map we would probably see bursts of new connections. This e-journal is a conduit. We invite you to use it to improve our scholarly activity—that is, LC practice. Write research articles about the evidence supporting your accomplishments; write about the rationale behind a successful practice and the problem or issue it addresses; write a perspective about something on your mind; write a response to what you are reading in this issue and previous ones. *Do* LCRP and make our wonderfully inclusive field even more vibrant.

References

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