Putting the Community in Learning Communities

Gen Ed PD-O-Rama
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From a community of learners to a learning community

Class A
- Faculty
- Students

Class B
- Faculty
- Students

Class C
- Faculty
- Students

Community
Why?

• Because “…the classroom is the most logical, most visible, most ubiquitous, and most neglected place for community on campus.”
  
Building community

• What is community?
• Why does it matter?
• How do we link neighborhoods (the separate classes) to a cohesive community (the LC?)
• What does “community” require?
• What’s absent and what can we add or change to establish community?
What does community require, & from whom?

The Opening Weeks: Establishing Community   p. 127

Recognize the students’ need to know and to support each other,

What factors does the professor need to consider in the first few weeks in order to create a classroom community?

Enhance the students’ image of themselves as learners.

Incorporate the students’ previous knowledge.

Value the diversity in the classroom.

Build an atmosphere receptive to answering and to asking questions.

Figure 4.1. Concept Map: Factors That Create a Learning Community

From Rhythms, as cited by Cox, 2017
Adapted, with permission, from Milt Cox, 2017

- Four days ago, Milt tried to apply what he has spent years studying and about FLCs (Course Learning Communities).
- For the record, he is the author of that blue book up there and the Editor in Chief of Learning Communities Journal and the Journal of Excellence in College Teaching.
- He shared some ideas on merging these two areas of expertise…

Faculty Student Learning and Development Changes
Top 5 impacts on themselves that faculty students reported…

1. Perspective on teaching and learning and other aspects of higher education beyond their own discipline-major.
2. Interest in the teaching learning process.
3. Understanding of and interest in SoTL scholarship/critical thinking.
4. View of teaching-learning as an intellectual pursuit.
5. Comfort level as a member of the university community.
Further…

- **Learning communities** are transdisciplinary groups of people assembled around common goals and interests who learn, develop, and share ideas relevant to a specific topic through a process of collaborative inquiry. A key to success is intentionality. As McGill and Beaty famously noted in 2001: successful learning communities involve "...a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done."

- Learning communities **value the enrichment of the self and the group.**
- Often, the emphasis is less on rules and a final destination than it is on the growth of ideas and identities along the way.
  - They "get things done", but with a higher degree of personal and professional enrichment.
Learning communities checklist

✓ Articulate goals
  ✓ For the class and the LC, noting the interconnections
✓ Align them with overarching structures
  ✓ Gen Ed objectives, LC objectives — the “why”
✓ Figure out ways of assessing if you’ve accomplished them
  ✓ For the class and the LC: What’s your evidence of community?
✓ Balance/integrate class and LC interests, topics, and strategies of inquiry
✓ Cultivate a meaningful social presence among members
✓ Optimize time and technology
✓ Stay engaged with one another and with content
✓ Be inclusive

• Goals?
• Alignment?
• Assessment?
• Balance/integration?
• Social Presence?
• Time and Technology?
• Engagement at Multiple Levels?
• Inclusive?