Assessing Integrative Learning
Insights from a National Project

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Presentation outline

❖ Impetus for project: gap in research and assessment
❖ Project overview: purpose, method, commitment to act
❖ Relationship between integrative and interdisciplinary work
❖ Power of examining student work
❖ Nature of "disciplinary grounding"
❖ Designing better integrative assignments
❖ Implications for working with first-year students

Impetus for National Project on Assessing Learning in Learning Communities

❖ *Learning Community Research and Assessment: What We Know Now*
   Research team: Kathe Taylor, William S. Moore, Jean MacGregor, Jerry Linblad

"Learning community assessment and research can and should probe more deeply into the nature of learning community interventions, and the nature of their impact on the learning of students, those who serve on teaching teams, and institutions. "

Project overview:
Purpose, method, commitment to act

❖ Challenge: What kind of learning do learning communities make possible?

❖ Method: campus teams as co-researchers
   - examine student work
   - use Collaborative Assessment Protocol
   - report on results at project meetings

❖ Commitment: Develop students' abilities to do the intellectual work of intentional integration

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Participating campuses—2 year

Broward (FL)	Kingsborough (NY)
Cerritos (CA)	LaGuardia (NY)
Chandler-Gilbert (AZ)	North Seattle (WA)
Everett (WA)	Skagit Valley (WA)
Garrett (MD)	Yakima Valley (WA)
Holyoke (MA)	

Participating campuses— 4 year

Clayton State University
College of Charleston
Iowa State University
Kennesaw State University
Sacramento State University
Temple University
University of Kansas
University of Washington-Bothell
Westminster College

An essential learning outcome
Integrative &/or interdisciplinary learning?

"Whether we try to take a stance on the stem cell research controversy, to interpret a work of art in a new medium, or to assess the reconstruction of Iraq, a deep understanding of contemporary life requires knowledge and thinking skills that transcend the traditional disciplines. Such understanding demands that we draw on multiple sources of expertise to capture multi-dimensional phenomena, to produce complex explanations, or to solve intricate problems."

From: Veronica Boix Mansilla, "Assessing Student Work at the Disciplinary Crossroads," *Change* 2004, January/February, 14-21

Relationship between integrative learning & interdisciplinary work

❖ First discovery

Integrative Learning

Interdisciplinary Learning

Collaborative Assessment Protocol
I. Getting Acquainted

❖ Introduce the work: presenting teacher shares minimal information about the work -- the course and level, and the assignment

❖ Clarify specific goal: examine the degree of integrative understanding; diagnose opportunities for growth

❖ Look at the work: read or observe the work

❖ Pointing out: point out aspects of the work they noticed

❖ Valuing the work: share qualities of the work that they appreciate

❖ Raising questions: raise questions and concerns that have come up

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Power of examining student work

❖ Second discovery

"Professional development has been the most powerful effect of the project for us. It has helped us...increase the energy within teams, demand a "product" in terms of student work, and enabled us to reflect more carefully on the product."
~ La Guardia Community College

"The protocol prompted faculty to notice and appreciate the work before moving to a critical examination." ~ North Seattle Community College

"Grounding the conversation in student work turns attention to long-term, deep learning. This conversation frames assessment in relation to key artifacts and change over time." ~ Iowa State University

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II. Zooming In - Targeting Assessment of Integrative/Interdisciplinary Understanding

1. Discerning the purpose of the work
Group members describe what they view as the purpose of the work.

2. Revealing disciplinary grounding
Group members describe evidence of disciplinary grounding, working through one discipline or field at a time.

3. Revealing integrations
Group members describe how the student brings things together and the extent to which the integration enriches or deepens the work.

4. Assessing thoughtfulness
Group members describe the student's reflections about his or her work.

Third discovery
Importance of Disciplinary Grounding

Knowledge
- focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Methods
- practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards of performance

Purposes
- anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Forms of communication
- demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

From: Veronica Boix Mansilla, "Assessing Student Learning at Disciplinary Crossroads," *Change, 2004*

What do biologists...

Knowledge ➔ know
- What do biologists know? What are the "big ideas" in the discipline?

Methods ➔ do
- How do biologists do their work? What range of methods do they use?

Purposes ➔ why
- Why do biologists do what they do?

Forms of communication—how do they share it?
- How do biologists share/present/demonstrate their expertise?

What do expert academic readers and writers...

Know...
- What do we know as readers and writers?

Do...
- What do we do as readers and writers?

For what purposes...
- Why do we read and write in academia?

How do we share our work?
- What forms do our reading and writing take?

In our courses, what do we ask students to...

Know...
- are we introducing students to the ideas that are central for us in our work in this field?

Do...
- are we asking students—even beginning students—to do what we do as experts, scaled at an appropriate level?

For what purposes...
- are we creating possibilities for students' work to be purposeful in the ways that our own work is purposeful?

In what forms?
- are we introducing students to a similar range of forms?

Designing Purposeful & Integrative Learning

What is the public issue?

What curricular, co-curricular, & community resources will you use?

Disciplinary Grounding
What do you most want students to learn from your discipline?

Disciplinary Bottlenecks
Underlying conceptions; abilities as readers, writers, quantitative thinkers; approaches to learning

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Implications: Working with first-year students

"In working with colleagues, we have become evangelists for understanding disciplines as the basis for integration. A LC team should begin by grappling with the types of disciplinary knowledge they would like students to gain..."
~ Cerritos Community College

"The team sees the need for and value of both integrative learning and disciplinary grounding. We find that we build both simultaneously. First year students are not experts in engineering design or horticulture knowledge; however, we include disciplinary knowledge in all of our student assignments and offer an opportunity for students to situate disciplinary grounding in integrative learning experiences."
~ Iowa State University

"In our view purposeful integration requires both depth and breadth—depth from rootedness within a discipline and breadth from the act of drawing connections across disciplines in order to see the bigger picture. Without disciplinary grounding, true integration cannot be realized."
~ Kingsborough Community College

For additional information

❖ December 2008 Special Issue
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❖ Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education website
www.evergreen.edu/washcenter

"Assessing Learning in LCs"

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