



Consortium for Illinois Learning Communities

The Learning Community Advantage

A theory of change for contemporary times

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Keynote Overview

- ❖ What kind of **learning** are we for everywhere on campus?
- ❖ What kind of learning do **learning communities** make possible?
- ❖ Theory of change: three critical dimensions for using learning communities as **a means for increasing student academic achievement**



What kind of learning are we for everywhere on campus?

Shift to abilities-based education

“Why study _____?” (or, what should every educated layperson know about my discipline)

“What do we want students to know and be able to do?”

Self-Assessment as Learning, Alverno College Faculty

Coverage ⇒ Key ideas, skills, habits of mind
Quantity of learning/“how much” ⇒ Quality of learning/“what”
Possessing knowledge ⇒ Using knowledge in the world



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...

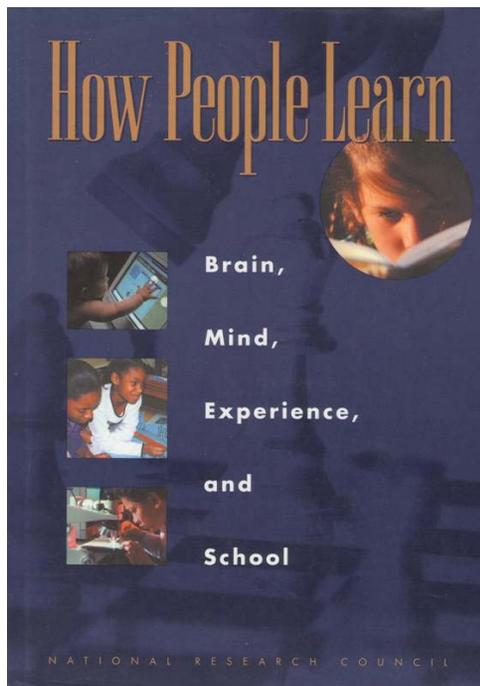
Are we creating possibilities for students' work to be purposeful in the ways that our own work is purposeful?

In what forms?

Are we introducing students to a similar range of forms?



Research on learning should inform teaching



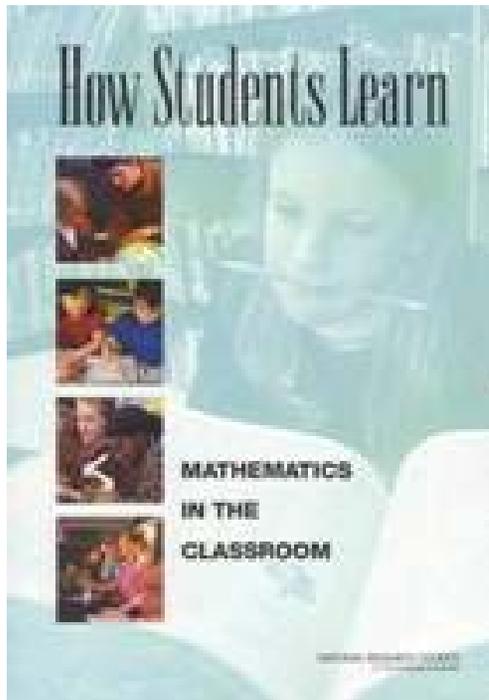
Three foundational principles

- 1st Engaging prior understandings
- 2nd Essential role of factual knowledge and conceptual frameworks in understanding
- 3rd The importance of self-monitoring

What kind of learning are we for everywhere on campus?



Research on discipline-specific learning



How experts differ from novices

- As readers, writers, and quantitative thinkers (foundational literacies)
- As readers, writers, thinkers in a specific discipline

What kind of learning are we for everywhere on campus?



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?

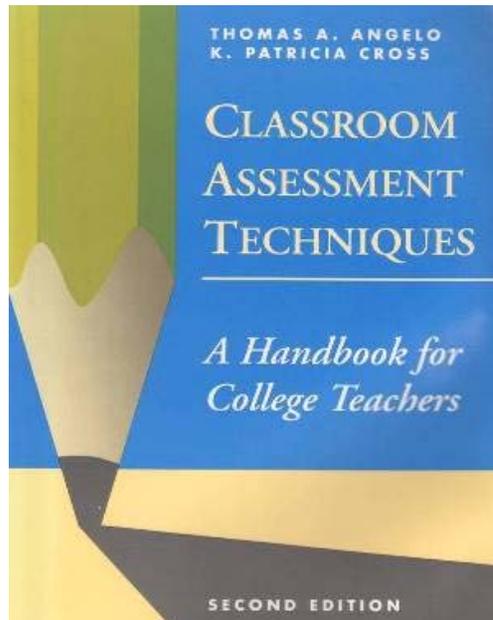
What forms do our reading and writing take?

What kind of learning are we for everywhere on campus?



In our classes:

Classroom Assessment Techniques



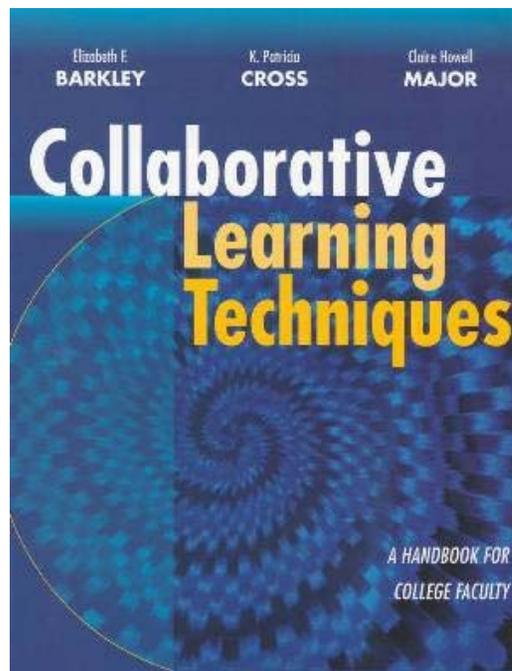
Effective teaching is articulated in relation to what students are actually learning through ongoing formative assessments; “pedagogy of substance” (one-minute paper, muddiest point, etc.)

How we find out what students are learning including (mis)understandings



In our classes:

Collaborative Learning Techniques



Students are learning how to learn “something,” developing agency and authorship, constructing meaning with others, examining an issue/text/problem as a (biologist, physicist, policy analyst, poet, air controller) might ...using the big ideas and practices of the discipline or field of study or area of expertise.

What kind of learning are we for everywhere on campus?



The Essential Learning Outcomes

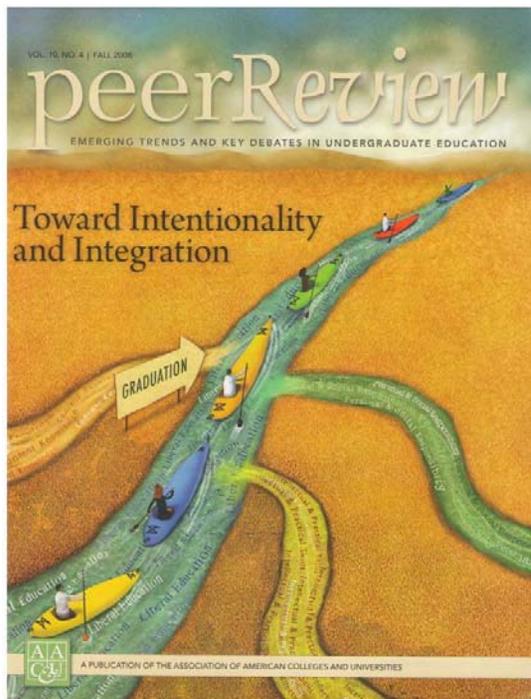
- ❖ **Knowledge of human cultures and the natural and physical world**
- focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring
- ❖ **Intellectual & practical skills**
- practiced extensively, across the curriculum--progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards of performance
- ❖ **Personal & social responsibility**
- anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges
- ❖ **Integrative learning**
- demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

~ AAC&U LEAP Report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, 2007

Teaching and learning for contemporary times



Integrative learning as a “21st century liberal art”



“Integrative learning marks a notable shift in the practice of the liberal arts from language we used to use—*understanding, appreciating, comprehending, remembering*—to actually being able to *do*. Students must know how to apply knowledge and to use it in new contexts.”

~ *Peer Review*, Carol Geary Schneider, Fall 2008



❖ What kind of learning do learning communities make possible?

“ 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



Elements of interdisciplinary learning

“Interdisciplinary work integrates knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines. Such work embraces the goal of advancing understanding (e.g. explain phenomena, craft solutions, raise new questions,) in ways that would have not been possible through single disciplinary means. ”

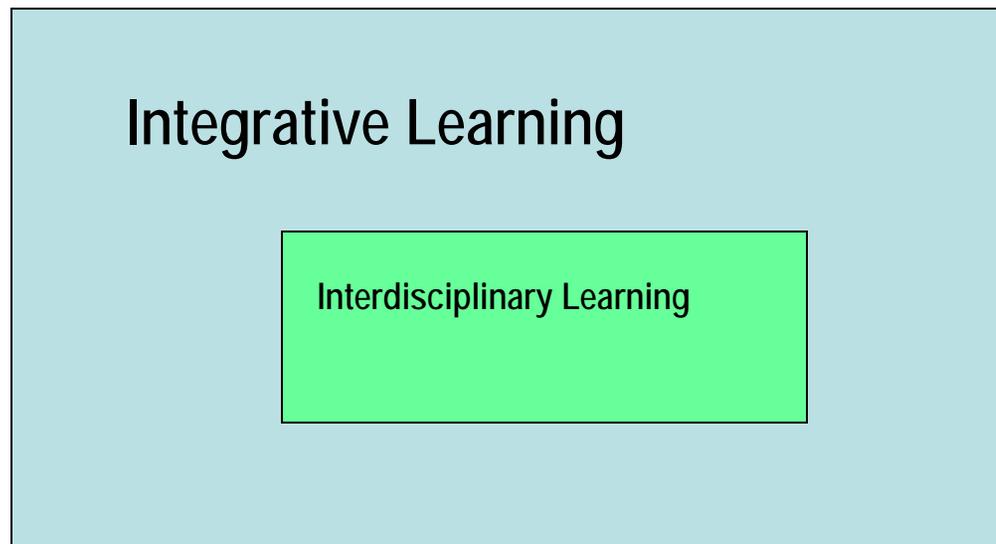
- Interdisciplinary Studies Project, Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

What kind of learning do learning communities make possible?



Making a critical distinction while recognizing a fundamental habit of mind

Integrative learning is a fundamental habit of mind;
Interdisciplinary learning represents a special case.





To do either integrative or interdisciplinary learning you need “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

~ Veronica Boix-Mansilla, “Assessing Student Learning at Disciplinary Crossroads,”
Change, 2004



Theory of Change: Three Critical Dimensions

Learning communities as a means for increasing student achievement

1st dimension: strategically-placed cohorts

2nd dimension: integrative and applied learning

3rd dimension: professional learning community



1st dimension: strategically-placed cohorts

- ❖ Data-based
- ❖ Curricular-trouble spots
- ❖ Student pathways
- ❖ Transition or momentum points



2nd dimension: integrative learning projects

- ❖ Core concepts and/or practices selected from each course
- ❖ Applied to contemporary issue, question
- ❖ Appropriate scaffolding in place including separate disciplinary assignments



3rd dimension: professional learning community

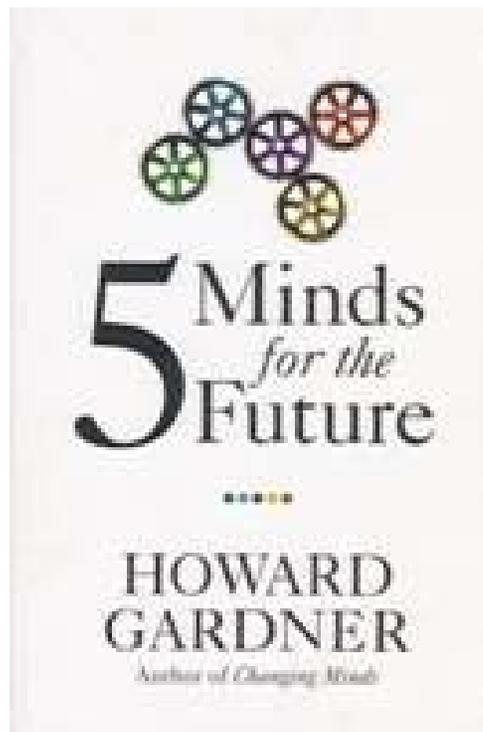
- ❖ Assess students' abilities (what they know and can do as readers, writers, quantitative thinkers, novice biologists, historians, sociologists, etc.)
- ❖ Tie teaching to ongoing formative assessment (CATs)
- ❖ Examine student work (collaborative protocol) and fine-tune assignments
- ❖ Puzzle, review qualitative and quantitative data
- ❖ Pursue inquiry-based scholarship: read and discuss research on learning and pedagogy and implement



Emerging consensus on assessment

“With strong endorsement from educators and employers, AAC&U’s LEAP report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, affirms that “the framework for accountability should be students’ demonstrated ability to apply their learning to complex problems.” By definition, this standard calls for a strong emphasis on students’ performance in **authentic integrative assignments and projects**”.

Peer Review, Spring 2007, Carol Geary Schneider



“An educational system is not worthy of its name unless its representatives can clearly articulate what that system is striving to achieve and what it seeks to avoid or curtail.”

~ Howard Gardner, 2008



Disciplined Mind

Employing ways of thinking associated with major scholarly disciplines (history, math, science, art, etc.) and major professions (law, medicine, management, finance, etc.) as well as crafts and trades; capable of applying oneself diligently; improving steadily, and continuing beyond formal education

Synthesizing Mind

Selecting crucial information from the copious amounts available; arraying that information in ways that make sense to self and to others

Creating Mind

Going beyond existing knowledge and syntheses to pose new questions, offer new solutions, fashion works that stretch existing genres or configure new ones; creation builds on one or more established disciplines and requires an informed "field" to make judgments of quality and acceptability

Respectful Mind

Responding sympathetically and constructively to differences among individuals and among groups; seeking to understand and work with those who are different; extending beyond mere tolerance and political correctness

Ethical Mind

Abstracting one's role at work and one's role as a citizen and acting consistently with those conceptualizations; striving toward good work and good citizenship