Currents

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EDITORIAL

Authenticity, Dialogue, and Diversity: Paths to Transformational Learning
—Martin Fromm

In our cultural and political climate today, social alienation and isolation are increasingly prevalent, polarization threatens to undermine the pluralistic foundations of democratic society, and politicization of identities distorts and hides the rich complexity and contextual nuances of the human social condition. With these challenges at hand, how can college and university educators create a learning environment where students feel connected to each other and to a broader fabric of constructive cultural dialogue? What kinds of assignments and projects can generate meaningful and equitable participation from students with different cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and preferred modes of self-expression? How can educators capitalize on the proliferation of digital media to enrich students' engagement with each other and their communities within and beyond the classroom?

The contributors to this issue take up this challenge on multiple levels. One area of focus is on eliciting students' understanding of the socio-cultural contexts of what they read, approaching the discussion of different genres of writing and methods of citation as an opportunity to develop in students a more socially situated purpose in reading and a consciousness of themselves as critically engaged participants in a wider dialogue with scholars and other creative voices. Another concern that emerges in these articles is with using digital media to stimulate more inclusive avenues for students' participation, self-expression and shared sense of purpose. Whether this involves collective class projects, anonymous postings for class discussion, or individual digital narratives, the contributors to this issue suggest ways to adapt online platforms for the cultivation of more dynamic learning communities in the classroom, the integration of rigorous standards of academic analysis with authentic modes of self-narration, and the creation of a safe and inclusive zone for sharing ideas and perspectives on course materials and issues brought up in class. Whether online or in the classroom, this research indicates that fostering greater awareness of and sensitivity to differing cultural backgrounds and perspectives requires a conscious effort both at the institutional and individual faculty levels, from collaborative initiatives in faculty training to specific assignments tailored to working with culturally diverse groups. This attention to diversity and inclusion is also critical for identifying the transformative tension between students' struggles and learning, prompting us as educators to find multiple ways to conceive of and trace the thresholds of learning that students must cross.

Much attention recently has focused on students' deteriorating reading habits in a world of constant distractions and information overload. In "Understanding Purpose(s): Connecting Students' Metacognitive Awareness of Genre and Reading Practices," Rachel Hall Buck reminds us that, to be effective, reading practices need to be tied to a deeper cognizance of context, structure, and purpose. She argues that placing more emphasis in reading assignments on metacognitive awareness of how genre informs not only the structure and form of texts but also the purposes and motivations behind writing them can make the reading process more meaningful for students. This awareness of how purpose and context inform the reading and writing of texts is also critical for students' research endeavors, of which the proper citation of sources is a key dimension. In "An Assignment Model for Teaching Students to Write from Sources," Elizabeth Kleinfeld and Abby Wright contend that "framing source citation as rhetorical moves rather than a simple formality" helps students to situate themselves in relation to "a larger disciplinary conversation." This way of approaching source citation, they argue, provides "an ethos-developing move, a way to create and build social capital" that empowers students by "pushing [them] toward practices that acknowledge authorial power and responsibility."

The proliferation of digital media and online learning platforms pose new challenges and opportunities for engaging students in critical reflection on writing

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and reading practices. Acknowledging the prevalence of social isolation and "a perceived lack of community and interaction" in online learning, in "Digital Selves: Personal Narrative Pedagogy in the Online Writing Course" Bethany Mannon presents as an antidote a "'personal narrative pedagogy'" [that] invites students to situate their writing in personal perspectives and lived experiences." Given that "much of students' day-to-day writing takes place online…and finds currency through verbal and visual self-representations," Mannon presents "thoughtful uses of personal narrative in online writing courses" as a way to "affirm the relevance" of writing in their lives while "acknowledge[ing]" for them "that knowledge is constructed and situated in individual experience, in social positions, and in complex identities." Several other contributors point out ways in which the use of digital technologies can stimulate students' participation and sense of community in the classroom. One strategy that Brandie Bohney proposes is the application of crowdsourcing to classroom learning through students' use of "shared documents online…to safely and anonymously share thoughts, ideas, questions, feedback, and other forms of their work and thinking." In "The Crowdsourcing Classroom: Engagement in the Age of Boaty McBoatface," Bohney argues that this approach can "provide a safe way for even introverted or uncertain students to contribute meaningfully to class activities" and is "useful in generating many ideas in a short period of time" and "sharing examples and explanations of course concepts for whole-class consumption." Shifting from anonymous modes of participation to semester-long group projects, Vanessa Ruget explores in "Crowdfunding in the Classroom" the innovative use of crowdfunding as a project-based learning approach that fuses online communication skills with in-class teamwork and community building. "Practic[ing] fundraising, web design, communication, and collaborative skills," the students in Ruget's First Year Seminar also acquired meaningful experience in navigating the logistical, economic, and socio-psychological terrain of raising money for philanthropic causes.

In addition to class projects and a shared sense of purpose, contributors to this issue also contend that varied approaches to organizing class cohorts, designing activities that facilitate awareness of group diversity, and developing culturally relevant pedagogies are critical to creating an inclusive learning community. In "Better

Together? Sense of Community in a Pre-Service Teacher Cohort Model," Kristen Ferguson and Natalya Brown share their findings about "the impact of a section (cohort) model on the sense of community of students enrolled in a one-year Bachelor of Education program." They conclude that "compared to their peers who are not organized in sections, the sectioned education students report an overall higher level of sense of community and score higher on all four dimensions of sense of community," which they suggest could also relate significantly to "a positive experience of belonging as well as positive feelings about university recruitment and alumni donations." Kirsten S. Ericksen shifts our attention to the design of specific in-class activities to promote critical awareness of and cultural skills for working in groups with diverse members. In "Educational Instruction for Group Work with Diverse Members: Innovative Student Classroom Engagement using a Game-Based Learning Activity," Ericksen's research shows that the adaptation of a common card game activity "increase[d] [participants'] knowledge/awareness about the types of diversity and impact of diverse members in groups." At a broader level, Duke W. Austin, Matthew Atencio, Fanny Yeung, Julie Stein, Deepika Mathur, Sukari Ivester, and Dianne Rush Woods investigate the impact of a faculty diversity and inclusion curriculum development program on the development of "intercultural learning" and "multicultural teaching competency" that can address the needs of a diversifying student body and "rectify achievement gaps for underrepresented minority students." In "Diversity and Inclusion Pedagogy: Addressing Multicultural Teaching Competency and the Achievement Gap at a Racially Diverse University," their findings indicate that "structured peer support and feedback" "in a sustained, institutionally-supported professional development context" led to improvements among participating faculty "in every measured aspect of multicultural teaching skill and knowledge" and enhanced "confidence, motivation, and skill when it comes to incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into their curriculum and assignments." This attention and sensitivity to diverse identities is also integral to identifying and mapping out the transformative learning processes that students experience. In "The Threshold Concept Map: Plotting the Liminal Space of Students' Struggle to Learn to Write in College," Bryna Siegel Finer, Emily Wender, Oriana Gatta, and Daniel Weinstein introduce a "mapping instrument to generate visual understandings of students' struggles with trou-

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blesome knowledge." Their research suggest that this approach helps students "navigate the 'transformative' space between struggle and learning" and "value[s] the process of oscillation by identifying specific points at which struggle might begin as pedagogical opportunities."

The book review selected by our Book Review Editor, Kisha Tracy, examines a new study that synthesizes much of the recent literature on teaching and learning and discusses small but significant and easily applicable strategies for improving learning outcomes. Daniel Guberman reviews James M. Lang's *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 2016).

I would like to express my gratitude to all who contributed to making this issue possible. In particular, the care and expertise that the referees and copy editors contrbuted to this issue is most appreciated. They are, in alphabetical order, Nathan Angelo, Laura Beerits, Patricia Boyd, Erika Briesacher, David A. Campbell, Mariana Calle, Ellen Carillo, Duke Dawson, Brandy Dieterle, Melissa Duprey, Barry Goldenberg, Charlotte Haller, Amy Hoaglund, Sandra Jamieson, Shannon Kelley, Tanya Mears, Alison Okuda, Ana Perez-Manrique, Brad Porfilio, Christina Santana, Mary Lynn Saul, Colleen Sullivan, Seth Surgan, Isaac Tesfay, Virginia Tong, Don Vescio, and Cleve Wiese.

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ESSAYS

Digital Selves: Personal Narrative Pedagogy in the Online Writing Course
—Bethany Mannon

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Abstract

This article proposes a "personal narrative pedagogy" that creates vibrant interaction in online first-year writing (OFYW) by inviting students to situate writing in lived experiences. I advocate an expanded approach, in which elements of personal narrative invigorate "academic" writing. I contend that students interrogate identities during the invention and arrangement of such writing, and can become rigorous, flexible writers by considering the ethics and craft of life narrative. I elaborate this pedagogy of personal narrative by demonstrating the intersections between scholarship in autobiography studies (Bishop, Smith and Watson), writing studies (Beerits, Bloom, Williams, Yancey), and digital pedagogy (Chick and Hassel, Grabill and Pigg, Ross). I conclude by describing the benefits of this pedagogy for OFYW, where students and teachers face challenges that stem from perceived absences of community in the distant, often impersonal non-spaces of online classes.

Keywords

personal narrative, online teaching, feminist pedagogy, first-year writing

Digital Selves: Personal Narrative Pedagogy in the Online Writing Course

Autobiographical writing is familiar from first-year writing (FYW) assignments that instructors frame as explicitly personal essays. Students receive permission to use the vertical pronoun in projects like literacy narratives that deem narrative and introspection rhetorically effective. In this article, I advocate for expanding the role of autobiographical or personal writing beyond individual assignments and using this genre as a foundation for the design and content of an online course. This "personal narrative pedagogy" invites students to situate their writing in personal perspectives and lived experiences, which is especially valuable in digital contexts where "identity construction is the first step in participating fully" (Almjeld, 2014, p. 73). Teachers of online writing aspire to create virtual course spaces with vibrant participation and palpable senses of community, and so should be particularly attuned to the ways perspectives, lived experiences, and strategies of self-representation inform writing. By embedding personal narrative in major projects and in the design of informal assignments, online instructors can facilitate productive (and pleasurable) interactions among class members.

These interactions are productive in face-to-face (F2F) courses but vital in online writing courses (OWC). Previous research shows that many of the challenges instructors and students experience in online courses stem from a perceived lack of community and interaction in the "often quiet, distant, lonely, impersonal non-spaces of online classes" (Chick & Hassel, 2009, p. 196). Chick & Hassel (2009) outlined a worst-case scenario when recreating a F2F classroom in an online format fails:

Digital Selves *continued*

The silences of cyberspace and the frequently solitary nature of online learning mean that in many online classes there are rarely discussions other than what's assigned, no debates, no laughter, no groups sitting together and having heated or engaged conversations about anything. Instead, both instructor and students may log on, post an assignment, and log off—a virtual commuter campus at its worst. (p. 198)

Similarly, Rendahl & Breuch (2013) found that online first-year writing (OFYW) "falls short in comparison to face-to-face first-year writing courses where conversation and collaboration are strongly held pedagogical values" (p. 298). Students perceive these differences as well. Boyd (2008) found that one of the most frequent concerns online students express is that "the online environment does not allow for the familiar face-to-face interaction that provides crucial feedback" (p. 228). One participant reported: "I felt that I did not have as much of a connection or interaction with the teacher and other students in the class, like I would of [sic] in a normal classroom environment" (230). Student dissatisfaction and their perceptions of the instructor as ineffective often appear in semester evaluations, a source of instructor frustration and a troubling difference between course formats that research by Lowenthal, Bauer, & Chen (2015) bears out.

When I began teaching online I expected to experience this isolation. Instead, I enjoyed my writing courses—a sharp contrast with the discontentment I heard among other teachers, including some colleagues. Researching online pedagogy, I find myself in disagreement again. This time I diverge from writers who present the disconnected nature of online courses as insurmountable or present the growth of online education as a necessary but unfortunate effect of rising student enrollment and shrinking department budgets (Chick & Hassel, 2009; deNoyelles, Rodriquez Milanes, & Dunlap, 2016). These conversations too often overlook new opportunities for learning that are grounded in twenty-first century students' informal and online literacy practices. Web-based writing classes hold rich possibility because they open avenues by which students can connect their academic work to writing in their day-to-day lives. Significantly, much of students' day-to-day writing takes place online—in social media, product and service reviews, online profiles, blog posts, think pieces,

and personal essays—and finds currency through verbal and visual self-representations. So too do the local, national, and global activist projects with which socially aware students might engage. Feminist pedagogy has long made a case that individual experience is central to learning (hooks, 1994; deNoyelles, Rodríguez Milanés, & Dunlap, 2016). Moreover, thoughtful uses of personal narrative in online writing courses affirm the relevance of rhetoric and composition to the writing that students expect to do in their futures. Treating personal narrative as a means of persuading or creating common ground with readers also acknowledges that knowledge is constructed and situated in individual experience, in social positions, and in complex identities.

I begin this article by elaborating on the design and conception of this personal narrative pedagogy and offering examples from my OWCs. I then explain how autobiography studies, composition studies, and feminist pedagogy inform this approach. Section three situates OWCs in the landscape of online *non-academic* writing in order to make a case that encouraging writers to use personal perspectives and lived experiences to develop argument teaches transferable rhetorical skills like audience awareness and the situated nature of knowledge. Moreover, this approach to academic writing is doubly valuable because it intervenes in the isolation many students feel as they complete online courses. Teachers and students may regard personal writing (and online courses) with hesitation. To invigorate both, I offer a pedagogy that places lived experiences and individual perspectives at the center of interaction and inquiry.

A Personal Narrative Focus for Online Writing Courses

In his study of writing instruction in the United States, David Gold (2008) proposed:

Perhaps our most effective pedagogical strategy may simply be closer contact with our students' lives. The meeting ground may have moved from professors' parlors to their offices and from their offices to e-mail exchanges, but our communications are no less important. (p. 155)

Personal narrative pedagogy brings students and teachers into closer interaction than OWC otherwise allows.

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Even though online students have limited opportunities for face-to-face meetings, their lives are palpably present when their writing incorporates personal narrative. Autobiography studies has theorized and defined terms like "personal narrative," and I attend to these distinctions more fully in the next section of this essay. Here, I pause to explain that I select the term "personal narrative" because it refers to an orientation towards self-representation and story that is present in various genres and modalities. This flexible, capacious terms is a better fit for my pedagogy than the terms "autobiography" or "memoir," which denote extended prose narratives and signal a "density of language and self-reflexivity about the writing process" (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 4).

This approach diverges from expressivist writing pedagogy in that it emphasizes the rhetorical work of writing from experience rather than authenticity, ownership, empowerment, and "prose suffused with an authentic personal voice" (Gere, 2001, p. 204). Students interrogate the positions from which they write and consider the ways personal narrative builds ethos, connects with audiences, forms communities, and contributes to debates. Used in this way, techniques of personal narrative invigorate the forms of writing that students readily recognize as academic, and make explicit the connections between coursework and the writing and thinking that they engage in outside the classroom. For example, introducing a research question by narrating an experience that created curiosity about that subject can articulate the stakes and the specific context for the research. Dialogue, character development, description, and introspection can likewise function as heuristics during early stages of writing or as rhetorical strategies. Framing discussion forums and similar short writing assignments as opportunities to write from experience creates openings for students to connect with each other and with course material from positions of authority and investment. As Wendy Bishop (2003) wrote—in the midst of a period life writing scholars have come to call the "memoir boom"—these conversations "have the possibility of infusing our classrooms with needed energy" (p. 273). For Bishop, personal narrative allows students "to discover what they don't yet know, to clarify what they don't yet understand, to preserve what they value, and to share their discoveries with others while writing essays that matter" (p. 273).

Courses in which students create narratives and compose multimodal texts infused with personal perspective do not become covert creative writing workshops or group therapy sessions. In both this article and my courses, I take care to specify that personal narrative need not entail revelations of deeply held secrets or stories of painful memories. While much of the scholarship on teaching life writing focuses on trauma and writing, I hold that traumatic experiences are not the only meaningful ones. As Ben Yagoda (2008) observed, in recent decades personal narrative has become "not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged" (p. 28-29). Students explore and apply Yagoda's claim in formal writing and informal discussion throughout the semester. They are free to use writerly judgment in deciding how to include elements of narrative and the personal most effectively to accomplish the purposes they choose for their writing. Indeed, developing a writerly judgment—which equips students as rhetors and as citizens who empathetically engage with each other—is one goal of the course.

One challenge of a personal narrative pedagogy is that an instructor becomes what Smith and Watson (2010) termed a "coaxer," a "person or institution or set of cultural imperatives that solicits or provokes people to tell their stories" (p. 64). This role positions me as co-producer of the personal narrative. I am conscious that I risk subordinating the writer's storytelling to my own idea of how the story should read and "how its subject should speak appropriately" (p. 68). Rather than remove myself as a coaxer—an impossible goal—I deal with this ethical question by actively soliciting stories that look outward as well as inward. I agree with Rachel Spear's (2013) argument that "when the focus remains on students alone, a sort of one-dimensional, product-focused pedagogy unfolds, and the layers and connection to others are inadvertently lost, dismissed, ignored" (p. 59). Personal narratives are often expressive but they are also rhetorical in the sense that they are "symbolic action aimed at changing minds, changing motives, and changing worlds" (Engels, 2015, 14). My goals for a personal narrative pedagogy in OWCs at every level are that writers gain experience in the following:

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- Deciding when self-references or personal writing distracts from or undermines an argument, and when these strategies bolster insights with detail, nuance, and specificity.

- Grounding research and investigation in local and specific contexts, to which writers can speak from positions of knowledge and care.

- Meaningfully responding to the personal narratives of classmates who have similar perspective and experiences; that is, thinking beyond "relatability" and similarity.

- Meaningfully responding to difference; that is, creating new knowledge through recognizing diverse experiences.

Focusing on these rhetorical uses of personal narrative and giving students the vocabulary to discuss argument and meaning creates a supportive environment for sharing personal narratives. My language in course materials and in feedback during planning and drafting stages models productive questions to ask other writers: "Why might this experience matter to someone else?" or "What insight do you want readers to take from this dialogue?" rather than "What is the point of this section?" These strategies model civility and curiosity in online conversation, avoiding scenarios where students respond to each other's stories in confrontational or demeaning ways.

As part of a layered, rhetorical approach to personal narrative, major writing assignments provoke students to select stories that engage the communities to which they belong or the communities they wish to join. I begin semesters with projects that ask for sustained, focused narrations of lived experiences. These personal narratives take many forms. One assignment for a first-year course asks students to physically visit a space that is outside their usual patterns of daily life and spend time in close observation of that place and their own experience in a "discomfort zone." Students then recount those observations with an eye to careful organization, vivid description, and invitational rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995). A personal statement assignment for upper-level courses asks students to reflect on the experiences and knowledge that prepare them for a job, internship, or academic program. Broadly speaking, assignments that center on self-representation push students to do the following:

- Examine and articulate the knowledge they gain from lived experience.

- Select specific and purposeful language.

- Reflect on their strategic uses of "I" and assess how their uses of experience and observation—as evidence, illustration, or ethos-building—might affect readers.

- Explore rhetorical possibilities, such as identification, affective responses in readers, using individual experiences as evidence of larger cultural facts, and crafting "convincing, complex, theoretically satisfying" arguments (Spigelman, 2004, 31).

Personal narratives task students with telling "a story that has a point." This phrase reminds them to attend to narrative elements (characters, dialogue, point of view, etc.) and establish goals for what audiences will think, understand, or do after reading. Beginning in this way introduces narrative elements and a personal narrative rhetoric to which students can later refer. Moreover, this framing emphasizes course objectives and argumentative claims, and asks writers to consider context as they work to move discussions forward.

The class then weaves these concepts into subsequent projects that students more readily recognize as "academic" writing. During investigative essays, proposals, and portfolios, personal narrative offers strategies they can integrate with research. Many find it a useful heuristic for locating their investments, prior knowledge, and specific interests in topics during planning stages, and I support them in deciding whether to remove self-references as they polish their drafts. Others employ personal narratives to illustrate the complexities and stakes of their arguments. Readings like Rebecca Walker's essay "Becoming the Third Wave," bell hooks's "Touching the Earth," E. B. White's "Education," and excerpts from Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, serve as models for situating knowledge, arguments, and calls to action in vivid first-person narratives. In order to use my role as coaxer to give greater writers control and flexibility, I craft assignment descriptions and comments on process work to encourage students to use the personal in different ways and to different degrees.

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Shorter and informal assignments throughout the semester continue our discussions of experience, self-representation, knowledge, and rhetorical situations. For example, weekly discussion forum prompts might ask students to find examples of digital life writing and analyze form and audience, or to weave personal experiences into research, multimedia presentations, and argument. In these informal personal narratives, students select aspects of their perspectives and experiences to make visible to classmates, establishing a ground for connection and conversation. Students also see that they are making themselves visible to their professor. Finally, students compose "academic rationales," in which they "theorize the choices made in their creative performances, including their thinking about form and content and how certain words and gestures reflect or resist the theories learned in the course" (Powell, 2007, p. 140). Reflection-in-process during a course centered on personal narrative looks in two directions: how past experience informs argument, and how the work of crafting narrative finds meaning in past events. This reflective writing, which might take the form of a timeline of blog or wiki posts, creates another site of dialogue about students' decisions in response to context and constraints.

Infusing writing courses with personal narrative does not overemphasize creative writing or allow the "chaos and confusion" feared by "critics of personal writing in (required) writing courses" (Bishop, 2003, p. 270). Instead, students connect their perspectives and memories to those of other writers, and argue and explore from this foundation of experiential knowledge. One discussion forum asked:

> **Part 1:** As we transition from writing personal narrative to conducting research in published sources, I would like you to think about how your experiences might intersect with research. To that end, identify two (2) possible research topics that are grounded in your experiences. Develop each one in a paragraph, describing the experience that you had and stating a question that experience raised in your mind—a question that would require some research to answer . . .

> **Part 2:** Respond to two classmates. Which ideas look promising? Which ones do you share an interest in? What types of sources would be useful to answer that research question?

Prior to this discussion, the class had written personal narratives, had read Kevin Roozen's "Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity" from *Naming What We Know*, and discussed Jack Selzer's "Rhetorical Analysis: Understanding How Texts Persuade Readers" (which includes and analyzes White's personal essay "Education"). In part because of this framing, students responded with both interpersonal connection and rhetorical possibilities in mind:

> *Student 1* (original post): At one point in time there was an increase in violence in the area that I currently reside. One evening we heard gun fire outside of our window. Justin my son asked if there was a zombie attack going on outside. Even though there were no zombies outside, it did make me wonder, is there a difference in how the brain responds to fictitious violence as opposed to violence in reality?

> The 2nd experience I had is when I realized we could be a positive influence in our community. . . . Wanting to do more raised the question, are there any programs or resource that could be used to help build up my neighborhood?

> *Student 2* (response): Hey [student 1],

> It is funny that you raised the question of how the brain responds to fictitious violence as opposed to violence in reality because I am considering . . . research into the potential correlation of media depicted violence and real world violence. . . . I think there are lots of peer reviewed articles that would be beneficial in this research. I hope you are able to view my later work assuming I continue with this topic as it could be interesting to you in regards to your son.

> [student 2]

> *Student 3* (response): I think your first question is really great. It is actually quite similar to what I wrote about in my personal narrative which dealt with my experience in war and how that changed my view of what our children are exposed to in TV, movies, video games, etc. I would suggest you google 'anti-war veterans' and take a look at what some

Digital Selves *continued*

people who have been exposed to extreme violence in real life to see how it changed their outlook on fictitious violence.

A second exchange in this assignment similarly facilitated connection:

Student 1 (original post): I am currently expecting and have been told I have placenta previa. They told me I wouldn't be on bed rest yet but I needed to take it easy. Does placenta previa have an effect on my growing child? If so, what? Is it possible for my placenta to move where it needs to be before the child is born? If its (sic) does not move, how does that affect my options for delivery?

Student 2 (response): Hi [student 1], first let me say, our class this semester is filled with such strong, resilient, diverse, and just hands down awesome people. Having to write a narrative and have all to read it was a great way to build comradeship among us. . . . The second topic would be very interesting, as the science of childbirth is anything by cut and dry. You would be able to use case studies and interview other women that have experienced placenta previa.

Discussion forums are common, but these exchanges demonstrated to me their potential as a space for storytelling and self-reference, connection and critical reflection.

Approaching low-stakes writing in this way establishes personal narrative as a starting point for writing, research, and—crucially—informal student interaction. As Lynn Z. Bloom (2016) explained, "From reading the autobiographies of fellow students and professional authors as well as writing their own, students develop the ability imaginatively to inhabit others' lives that were previously closed to them" (p. 9). I have observed that members of OWCs often feel more willing to experiment with self-reference in low-stakes or informal writing than with formal assignments that seem to require an academic voice (and comprise a larger part of the semester grade). As a professor in these courses, I also interact with students in these informal writing spaces. I use brief self-references to cultivate an individual (and, for me,

decidedly nerdy) teaching presence. While I expect this kind of interaction to emerge organically in F2F courses where my enthusiasm and personal investment is visible, online spaces require intentional self-references to create a teaching presence that facilitates learning and community.

Asking students to situate their informal writing in identity and experience moves prewriting and reading responses "toward the immediate and concrete lived experiences of thread participants" (Grabill & Pigg, 2012, p. 114). Students might perceive these forums the way they perceive other online writing: anonymous, uninterrupted opportunities to expound on opinions or observations. However, analyzing the rhetoric of online rants and trolls provides grist for our discussions: Are anonymous, unfiltered, and unsupported claims persuasive? Do you pay attention and regard them as informed, worthwhile contributions? Who (else) might? What phrases, tones, or contexts signal that writers are trolling? These conversations instill in students a critical and ethical approach to online interactions. To be sure, I set parameters for engaged, respectful conversations in our course and I confront the rare writers who disparage or dismiss classmates' personal narratives. More effective than such policing, though, are discussions about the norms and problems of communication in a range of online spaces. These are pressing topics during contentious debates over truth, credibility, and violence in online writing. Students also see how the affordances of online spaces connect their insights to those of others. Writing from experience, students locate their digital and academic selves in Burkean parlors of debates they encounter online.

I maintain our focus on rhetoric by engaging students in two metaconversations. First, when introducing readings and assignments I make a case that writing and reading personal narrative means engaging in rigorous critical thinking. Laura Beerits (2016) astutely noted that instructors who are concerned about students' self-referencing "worry that students using first-person writing will be more likely to make unresearched inquiries, express unbridled emotion, or share overly personal revelations—that is, that students will 'sound' unacademic in their prose" (p. 561). Students may share this same worry about sounding unacademic. To that end, my students and I consult essayists like Walker and jour-

Digital Selves *continued*

nalists like Pollan who deploy personal narrative (often in combination with research) as one effective tool for public discourse. Writing personal narrative may come easily at times, but critical self-analysis and empathic engagement rarely do. Bloom (1998) defended the intellectual rigor it requires: "Personal writing requires the same tough-minded analytical capability that academic discourse involves; it is only that the personal-sounding writing appears to be cruising on overdrive instead of grinding gears on the uphill climb" (p. 72). By analyzing autobiographical texts, students learn to read and think critically and to understand a variety of discourse communities. Writing and reading personal narratives can indeed be a pleasure, but both acts require students to engage with the opinions and perspectives of those like them and those unlike them.

Second, we discuss the transferability of personal writing. Explaining the reasoning of a course design is especially vital in OWCs (Boyd, 2008), and the effectiveness of a personal narrative pedagogy also depends on communicating the rationale to students. As Ewing (2013) noted, students frequently do not see academic value in digital writing and regard this skill as separate from school and intellectual discourse. Multimodal and online composition "requires that these barriers be broken down so that students can recognize that not all composition occurs in the parameters of a classroom or within a Word document" (p. 560). Naming what they know about online writing and self-representation also helps students develop strategies for negotiating unfamiliar rhetorical contexts and understanding how genre conventions in one context can be altered or adapted for a new one (Williams, 2014, p. 119).

These two metaconversations anticipate my eventual evaluations of writing projects. Even when students think of personal narrative as rhetorical rather than expressivist or "for fun," the sense of personal exposure that comes with writing from experience demands particular care from the teacher. A focused conversation about the ethics of evaluating personal narrative is beyond the scope of this article, though I hope future researchers examine this question. Three strategies mitigate students' hesitations about submitting personal narrative projects for grades. First, grading rubrics establish what elements of a project will—and will not—be assessed. Students view these rubrics as they plan and write. Following Powell's (2007)

observation, "it is not the fact of a life that makes a story but the way it is crafted" p. 140), my assessment criteria focus on craft. That is, I take into account a student's purposeful use of detail, rather than the nature of the details shared. Intense emotion and dramatic self-exposure do not lead to higher (or lower) grades. Second, reflections and academic rationales direct my reading of submitted versions. When students experiment with forms of digital composition that I don't fully understand, like Instagram stories, self-analyses illuminate their sites of learning, struggle, and decision-making. Additionally, students who use personal narrative in oblique ways have space to unpack those decisions and their implications. Finally, offering opportunities to revise personal narratives frees writers to take risks with this form. I regularly preface feedback "If I were seeing this as a rough draft, I would recommend . . ." to reiterate a standing invitation to envision new audiences, other forms, and additional meanings.

Centering personal narrative in a course teaches students general and flexible principles about writing, rather than "decontextualized 'skills' or rigid formulas" (Wardle, 2009, p. 770). At times, I have wondered whether this approach prepares students for the genres that business or biology courses require. However, I agree with Wardle that teaching students about writing—focusing on "how people use writing, how people learn to write, how genres mediate work in society" (p. 784)—is both productive and achievable. The foundational goal of a personal narrative pedagogy is to learn about writing, related to but not limited to the genres of the university, and to examine the positions from which we engage with the world.

Personal Narrative in Theory

I came to this pedagogy from my background studying personal narrative as a feminist rhetorical practice and my own rewarding experiences teaching online. While a graduate instructor at a large public university in the mid-Atlantic United States, I taught three asynchronous OFYW courses and one asynchronous online section of American Literature 1865-present (a writing-intensive survey course). Later, while Visiting Assistant Professor at another large mid-Atlantic public university, I taught several asynchronous online courses, including Advanced Composition. I saw firsthand how online courses expand

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access to include students who work, care for family members, and serve in the military. I also observed students committing themselves to the writing process and sustaining lively exchanges with classmates and with me. Not every student participates vigorously, and this dynamic is certainly not exclusive to my online courses. Still, these experiences underscore the importance of studying strategies for fostering the interactions and investment in writing that make online teaching rewarding for students and faculty.

My positive experiences with lively student participation and thoughtful writing in OWC contrasted with the complaints I heard from colleagues. When I told one that I had requested online course assignments, she said, "Honey, I wish you had asked me about that first. I would have told you to avoid online teaching for as long as you could." The department facilitated digital pedagogy training and rich discussions, but instructors voiced frustrations with the impersonal nature of online teaching and the difficulty of translating F2F classroom practices for online spaces. I felt moved to defend OWCs and I continue to feel committed to engaging the new opportunities that online education affords.

Confluence and agreement between life writing studies, feminist pedagogy, and composition studies demonstrate the timeliness of a personal narrative pedagogy. The field of life writing studies provides useful definitions of—and distinctions between—forms of autobiographical writing. The comprehensive study of the field, *Reading Autobiography* (Smith & Watson, 2010) lists sixty genres of life narrative with defining characteristics that often reflect "time, place, belief system, and social position" (p. 256). Smith and Watson offer "life narrative," another usefully capacious category that includes "written, performative, visual, filmic or digital" acts of telling one's own life or the life of another (p. 4). However, this definition includes the lives of others and the phrase indicates that life events—of the writer or subject—are the main topic of the text. Moreover, Julie Rak (2015) cautions that when using the term "life writing" we may inadvertently use "methods not suited to online research" because they are grounded in textual analysis and collapse "life" and "living" (p. 159–58). In these definitions and distinctions between genres, Rak, Smith, and Watson developed concepts and tools for exploring the possibilities of personal narrative.

With these discussions of genres in mind, I select "personal narrative" as the term that best describes the role of self-representation in OWC. Emphasizing the personal brings to the surface not only lived experience but also situated perspective as a source of knowledge and key dimension of a writer's ethos. I also find it useful to keep the concept of the personal in view. As I explain, unpacking the multiple meanings of personal—beyond confession and private disclosure—expands students' identities as writers in academic and non-academic contexts. Finally, this phrase accommodates the proliferating digital self-representation that, Rak (2015) explained, "appear as part of coding, part of big data collection and manipulation, responses to online affordances such as requests for information, or in visual media such as photographs, video, or films" (p.160).

Personal narrative pedagogy shares several goals with feminist pedagogy, which articulates the indispensable role of personal experience in constructing knowledge (DeNoyelles, Rodríguez Milanés, & Dunlap, 2016, p. 489). Personal narrative also facilitates connections—between students and material, among class members—that feminist pedagogy regards as central to engagement and empowerment. This "engaged pedagogy" does not offer students information "without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experience" (hooks, 1994, p. 19). In feminist classrooms, relationships and writing do not gloss over the differences in experience and perspective within a community of learners, and students "feel free to *use their sites of authority—where they already stand and what they already know*—to help contribute to the knowledge of the course" (Chick & Hassel, 2009, p. 198). The emphasis in this passage is mine, underscoring goals that resonate with the learning that takes place through writing and reading personal narrative independent of any gender studies course content. A student encounters the other writer's perspectives and lived experiences, and learns how they are similar or different from his or her own. Structured reflective writing—such as online discussion forums—guides students in the thoughtful interactions with other students' ideas that is one of the goals of a feminist pedagogy. Finally, centering intellectual exploration on students' perspectives and experiences creates inclusive, empowering class environments.

Digital Selves *continued*

The composition field has long recognized a place for expressive and reflective writing in FYW classes. Memoirs and literacy narratives are staples of FYW syllabi, even if many teachers treat them as less complex or demanding assignments. With feminist pedagogy and autobiography studies in mind, however, I advocate for a deeper analysis of and different stance toward personal writing. Wardle (2009) grouped common assignments into nine genres. Four of those nine— autobiography/personal narrative, profile, interview, and travel narrative—parallel life writing genres. Two more—observation and reflection—draw heavily upon introspection, self-analysis, and foregrounding of individual perspective (p. 773-74). These "mutt genres," to use Wardle's often-quoted phrase, may "appear only as arbitrary assignments for the students" (p. 777). However, composition research recognizes the personal benefits of engaging in autobiographical, expressive, or reflective writing. Bloom (1998) unequivocally advocated for personal narrative. "Such writing enables our students to find their own voices," she argued, adding, "Students take their writing seriously because they are invested in it; such investment makes them willing to write and rewrite and rewrite again" (p. 128). The insights from research on reflective writing also have implications for personal narrative pedagogy. Recent studies focus on the ways subjective reflection "contributes to and provides evidence of knowledge developed experientially" (Yancey, 2016, p. 6). Reflection in its different forms—like in-class journaling, reflective pauses during discussion and writing, and cover memos—enable writers to "determine whether there are similarities between prior situations or problems and the current one that would benefit from transfer of prior knowledge" (Beaufort, 2016, p. 33). Personal narrative, while it attends more to narrative elements and does not always explicitly recount thought processes, finds a parallel in this metacognition and self-analysis.

Despite Gold's call for closer contact with students' lives, scholars, teachers, and at times students dismiss personal narrative—like online writing—as less consequential and demanding than "the more privileged genres of analysis and argument" (Robillard, 2003, 82). They might also regard these activities with ambivalence or exclude them from conceptions of serious or academic writing (Arroyo, 2013; Williams, 2014; Takayoshi, 2015; Beerits, 2016). However, these writings are internetworked, highly rhetorical, and mediated by sophisticated writing tools. Takayoshi's 2015 study of Facebook users concludes that "seemingly trivial written compositions" involve a "complex, fleeting, and richly rhetorical process of decision making" (9). Ewing (2013) explored the pedagogical possibilities of incorporating YouTube, Tumblr, Yelp, and explorations of online personas in composition courses. Students might also be familiar with sites that promote shared interests and invite interaction through comment threads and re-posting. Ewing (2013) and Jen Ross (2014) described the "webness" of online classes, which Ross defined as "the specific qualities of meaning-making and text-making in digital environments," that informs assignments and interactions (p. 97). I contend that personal narrative is one prominent aspect of webness. Interactivity, or the "communicative interplay between a storyteller, an audience, and the story itself," also characterizes online writing and distinguishes it from older nondigital forms of writing (Page & Thomas, 2011, p. 12).

The antecedent genres—news-inspired think pieces, blogs, Yelp reviews, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms—that guide students in multimodal writing and writing for OWC are not only digital, they frequently revolve around acts of self-representation. Grabill & Pigg (2012) show that writers contributing to online discussion forums perform their identities in short written narratives that let them access and approach the conversation. Contributors to online discussions deploy this "identity-in-use" to contextualize questions and "position them as important enough to garner future responses" (p. 113). In the examples Grabill & Pigg analyzed, identity performances enable writers' rhetorical agency not by claiming expertise, but by "telling stories of their interactions with the topics at hand" and encouraging thinking together (p. 114).

Forum discussions are only one setting where writers "leverage identity to move conversations" (Grabill & Pigg, 2012, p. 116). During the 2016 presidential election, Christian writers and leaders Beth Moore and Trillia Newbell took to Facebook and Twitter to share that they had been sexually assaulted and harassed. These writers based their critiques of discourses around sexual assault in their identities as survivors. In the weeks following the election, social media users posted and circulated accounts of violence they observed or experienced in their communities. Their stories appeared on digital publi-

Digital Selves *continued*

cations, Twitter, and Facebook; social media circulated these stories as acts of political advocacy, coalition building, and protest. In a cultural moment where personal narrative is ubiquitous, students may not regard these practices as "mutt genres" at all, but instead as writing that taps into the rhetorical power of such witnessing. Not all writing online is so politically charged, of course. Students will also likely know longer forms of personal narrative, like the *Humans of New York* story project (on Facebook and at http://www.humansofnewyork.com/). *Humans of New York* offers a counterpoint to heated debates and seeks to shape public consciousness through first-person revelations of the kinds of individual experiences rarely shared on worldwide stages. These examples demonstrate the close connection between identity, personal narrative, and digitally mediated writing.

Because creating, reading, and circulating online texts is woven into many students' daily lives, they enter OWCs with a view of writing as flexible, situated in specific contexts, and networked with other writers. Online teaching therefore creates possibilities that scholars and teachers overlook if they approach OWC design as a process of "recreating the engaged and interactive class dynamics of a F2F classroom" (Chick & Hassel, 2009, p. 201). To begin with, online courses carry the distinct (if maybe obvious) advantage that most communication takes place in writing. As Arroyo (2013) argued, the online classroom creates a space where one doesn't occasionally "choose to write" but where "everything is writing" (p. 3). An OWC "places writing at the center of human interaction, which makes it a cultural practice—not merely a tool for communicating thoughts—intertwined with identity construction, relationship building, and community involvement" (p.3). While the occasional student neglects to participate in these weekly assignments, I usually see the majority offering meaningful contributions. The online discussions I observed seem to remove the pressure to speak quickly and before a "live" audience. Perhaps for this reason, discussion boards and private informal writing (analytical, personal, and combination of the two) yielded consistent and thoughtful responses from students in my classes.

Personal Narrative Pedagogy Across the Curriculum

Composition scholars have called for reconsiderations of personal writing and the "dialectical relationship be-

tween narrative and the genres we privilege in our writing classroom" (Robillard, 2003, p. 82; see also Spigelman, 2004). More recently, Ewing (2013) advocated for assignments where students use the forms they already know to compose "for distinct rhetorical purposes" (p. 555). Today, a complex personal narrative pedagogy requires attention to digital contexts; in fact, as I have shown, online classes are the sites where this pedagogy might find its most natural fit and have the greatest payoff.

Teachers across the disciplines will be familiar with the challenge of creating an environment that invites thoughtful participation from all students. While some students thrive in F2F verbal discussion, teachers regularly wonder why certain students remain silent in class discussion but submitted work that reflects deep engagement. Online courses reframe discussion in productive ways. In-person discussion can tend to privilege fast and extemporaneous thought, reward extroversion, and emphasize the individual speaker; online, students have the benefit of reflecting before writing, taking care with their phrasing in original posts and responses to others, and exploring ideas collaboratively. These benefits might be especially welcome for first-year students new to college-level writing and critical thinking.

Students bring their own lives to the classroom in ways both sanctioned and unsanctioned; today, that means they bring their online writing and reading. Online courses are poised to incorporate these literacy practices. These sites of writing, which include social media, discussion threads, and other forms, invite and validate acts of self-representation. The short-form, internetworked composing that students do outside of class provides a resource for online courses and situates them in digital writing culture. Teachers in a range of disciplines might consider the antecedent genres that students draw from (sometimes consciously) for guidance when they begin writing the unfamiliar genres of their field (Williams, 2014). Across the curriculum, studying sites of online writing illustrates the specific ways that academic work intersects with students' writing in their everyday lives— and the avenues for deeper connection that these sites create.

Digital Selves *continued*

Notes

1. Autobiography scholar Julie Rak (2013) dates this memoir boom to the years "roughly spanning the first decade of the twenty-first century" (p. 3). Leigh Gilmore (2016) expands that definition to include "the surge in life narratives published in the late twentieth century" (p. 85).

2. Possible prompts for weekly writing include:

   • Describe how your identity and experience shaped your professional plans. At what times in your life have you realized where your talent, affinity, and motivation lies? Have any parts of your environment constrained you?

   • Name and link to two online publications that you visit for news and discussions of topics you care about. What appeals to you about the publications? How do you participate in conversations there (sharing articles, submitting original writing, reading, etc.)? Then, describe your ethos in that community. How do you project an identity, and how do you decide what to write or re-post for particular audiences and contexts? In other words, reflect on the rhetorical nature of your participation.

   These are low-stakes writing in terms of evaluation, but high-stakes in terms of critical self-awareness. See also the list of prompts in *Reading Autobiography* (2010), Lynn Bloom's concepts and topics for life writing in "Coming to Life" (2016), and Ewing's (2013) assignments that compose for social media platforms, YouTube, and Yelp.

3. In "It's Time for Class: Toward a More Complex Pedagogy of Narrative," Amy Robillard (2003) argues for a complex pedagogy of narrative:

   > As long as we continue to devalue the possibilities of narrative in the composition classroom, we will continue to marginalize the possibilities for working-class students to develop an understanding of why things happen, their consequences, their material results in the present.

   While I do not focus specifically on working-class students, or low-income and first-generation students, Robillard's analysis of the connection between class, narrative, and the status of academic writing resonates with my argument. Devaluing the possibilities of online courses also marginalizes the possibilities for those students who pursue higher education outside of the traditional F2F classroom.

Digital Selves *continued*

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TEACHING REPORTS

Understanding Purpose(s): Connecting Students' Metacognitive Awareness of Genre and Reading Practices

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Abstract

In the most recent CWPA Outcomes Statement, both reading and genre have taken more prominent roles. However, the connection between the two is often unclear. In order to raise further questions about these connections, the author presents results of a semester-long study with students in an FYC genre-based pedagogy course in order to understand student perceptions of how a metacognitive awareness of genre impacts students' perceived reading practices. Students' changing understanding of genre included structural and sociorhetorical knowledge. The student responses shed light on the challenge of determining the author's purpose for writing a text and students' purpose for reading, but also the relationship between genre, purpose, and reading strategies.

Keywords

genre; reading; basic writing; WPA Outcomes Statement

Introduction

Many scholars have discussed the reading "problem" in college (Carillo, 2009, 2015, 2018; Horning, 2004, 2011; Joliffe, 2012), and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) has attempted to alleviate this problem through their recent Outcomes Statement (3.0) acknowledging that "improved reading practices is a desirable outcome for FYC" (Dryer et al., 2014). Reading, purposes, and genre all play a more prominent role in the revised Outcomes Statement. These additions help move students from imagining the readers of their own writing to how they themselves are readers of various texts within different classes.

Knowing the purpose for reading a text is a vital part of the activity and can direct a student's reading practice. Nilson (2016) suggests that few students approach a text with a clear purpose and instructors need to "give them one or teach them how to find their own purpose" (p. 307); however, many instructors have a difficulty discussing purposes for reading (Adler-Kassner & Estrem, 2007). Knowing the purpose is further complicated in the Outcomes Statement by combining "composing and reading," but not making a clear distinction between the differences between purposes for reading and purposes for composing.

Understanding Purpose *continued*

Genre has also taken a more prominent role in the Outcomes Statement (OS) and students are urged to "gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purpose." But those purposes may look very different. A student's purpose for reading a particular text in a class may be different than her purpose for writing a particular text about that reading and trying to imagine a purpose for someone reading that particular text. Reading as a form of inquiry can be different than composing as a form of inquiry.

The authors of the OS acknowledge that the terms "composing" and "genre" should be seen as boundary objects: "objects that afford cooperation without consensus; they are strictly defined *within* a particular community of practice, but loosely defined *across* different communities of practice" (Sills, 2018, p. 72). Although there is an assumption in the Outcomes Statement that students should understand how their genre awareness impacts their reading, there is no clear connection or clarification about how this happens or what it might look like *within* my own classroom. It is within this research that I place my own teaching as I wondered about how to talk about reading with my students in a first-year composition course in a way that would make them more aware of their reading strategies and practices. This adds to the growing research aimed at making reading more visible in the classroom (see Carillo, 2009).

In this article, I first briefly review definitions of genre from various pedagogical perspectives. After explaining the design of my own genre-based curriculum in a basic writing course, I show how students' definitions of genre changed during the course of the semester and how this metacognitive awareness of genre impacted their perceived reading practices. Responses shed light on the Outcomes Statement and the role that instructors in all disciplines have in facilitating reading practices so that they can "help students build on what they learn in introductory writing courses" (CWPA, 2014).

Genre Theories and Reading

Kenneth Goodman's (1967) theory of reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" has been extremely influential in reading theories. Guessing or making predictions involves "having some expectation of what the speaker or writer is likely to say, by making use of what we know already, we protect ourselves against being overwhelmed by irrelevant information" (Smith, 2004, p. 39-40). In schema theory, then, comprehension is a process between what the reader already knows and the text. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) draw a distinction between what they call formal schemata (background knowledge of organizational structures of a text) and content schemata (background knowledge of the content of the text) (p. 560).

This background knowledge relates directly to a student's knowledge of genre and helps students make predictions when they read by knowing that a "novel will be constructed in a particular way, that a scientific article will follow a certain format, that a letter will observe typical conventions" (Smith, 2004, p. 46). This knowledge of the relevant structures of the text helps students to predict what the next part of the text will be about. Proficient readers are able to guess what will come next as they read and this prediction guides them as they read and as they write. These internal patterns and structures "exist to provide orientation for both readers and writers" (Tardy and Swales, 2007, p. 565), although Nilson (2016) suggests that students don't know how each genre of assigned reading is organized (p. 306).

Genres are commonly understood as groupings of recognized texts. Studying text structure and form have been important in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) genre-based approaches. There have been numerous studies in foreign language contexts studying reading practices of students connecting genre awareness with improved reading. By making a text's structural features explicit, many researchers have demonstrated benefits of genre-based instruction by having students study news articles, textbook entries, and research articles (Hyon, 2002), literature reviews (Swales and Lindemann, 2002), and discipline-specific features (Cheng, 2008; Spector-Cohen, Kirschner, Wexler, 2001). Being aware of the text structure also helps students remember information they read (Sadeghi, Hassani, Hemmati, 2013). Mary Schleppegrell (2010) also concludes that as students learn to categorize clauses as presenting, doing, saying, sensing, or being, they become more aware of the language they read and write as they develop this metalanguage about structure (p. 27).

Understanding Purpose *continued*

The common theme of these studies is that by teaching students in foreign language contexts to be aware primarily of structural aspects of a text, they are able to become more proficient readers. This awareness may become a part of the student's formal schematic knowledge, but students may not have enough content schematic knowledge to make all predictions necessary. Moving beyond a recognition of structure may be problematic. In another prominent study about reading, Negretti and Kuteeva (2011) demonstrated that all students in a genre-based course demonstrated "declarative (what) and procedural (how) knowledge of genre-relevant aspects of academic texts" but only a few were able to demonstrate "conditional (when and why) knowledge of the genre" (p. 108). Moving into that conditional knowledge of when and why is harder for students to accomplish. One possible explanation is that they do not have any "insider" knowledge about these communities and this lack of content schemata knowledge affects how students read.

In contrast to these genre approaches, Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) focuses not so much on the text as on the social action that is accomplished by the text (see Miller, 1987). In fact, the genre is not the text but the action. In this sense, RGS focuses not on the "ever-shifting traits of particular genres," but rhetorical contexts (Devitt, 2015). Students are closer to a more "authentic" action when they understand the author's purposes for composing, but students still need to understand how to use the text in certain situations. In Johns' (1997) socioliterate theory of genre-based pedagogy, she stresses the need to include more than just text content and form in genre schemata, saying that "considerable knowledge about context, about readers' and writers' roles, and about the values and registers of cultures and communities also affect genre knowledge" (p. 15).

Many composition scholars have studied reading practices, but genre is not always an active part of the discussion. Haas and Flower (1988) describe a "rhetorical reading" practice that encourages readers to understand how authors intend to produce a certain effect on a target audience (p. 182). Patrick Sullivan (2012), for example, has offered six guidelines in his "deep reading" approach that connect reading with thinking, but genre knowledge is not mentioned. Ellen Carillo (2015), one of the most prominent advocates of teaching reading in composition classrooms, offers a mindful reading approach "where students become *knowledgeable, deliberate,* and *reflective*

about *how* they read and the demands that contexts place on their reading" (p. 117). Carillo does include the notion of genre in this framework, stating that facilitating transfer is more productive if students have an *awareness* of the relationship between genres and reading practices (p. 107). Alice Horning (2011) offers a pedagogical approach that she labels "expert reading" which includes a meta-awareness of organizational structure, context, and also purpose.

A reader's awareness and understanding of text structures are important for comprehension. Smith (2004) states, "If we don't know the relevant structures, then we won't understand the text, or our reading of it will be distorted" (p. 47). But this understanding of generic structures or formal schemata is only part of the complicated reading process because it leaves out the social aspect of reading, beyond just knowing the context or the content schemata. This includes background knowledge about the content, but also background knowledge about how a text is used within different communities. Reading involves this knowledge of structure, but also rhetorical knowledge, which includes the purpose of the text for the student in particular contexts.

Knowing the purpose of the text is important because different purposes require different skills and strategies (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). For example, a student might read a novel for a class knowing the instructor would be testing on certain aspects of the novel. The student might underline, take notes, and pay attention to different details while reading. However, the student reading the same novel for the purpose of personal enjoyment and not for a class might read the same novel very differently. The context in which a genre is being read can make a profound difference in *how* a student reads something.

There is limited research about how students connect their genre knowledge to their reading practices in composition classrooms. This current study aims to fill this gap specifically by exploring students' understanding of genre and how that shapes their reading practices. Importantly, student responses demonstrate the importance of knowing the purpose of a reading assignment and how it will be used within a specific context in order to become more proficient readers. It also raises further questions about the CWPA Outcomes Statement and how teachers in all disciplines may meet the suggestions.

Understanding Purpose *continued*

Course Design and Methods

This study is placed in the realm of teacher research, which is defined as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 5). This challenges the "conventional belief in the separation between researchers (those who make knowledge) and teachers (those who consume and disseminate it)" (Ray, 1992, p. 174). As the teacher of the class, I had insights about the students, but there are also limitations to consider. Students may feel obligated to tell me what I want to hear while, on the other hand, students often don't know that they know something or can't articulate it, so surveys and classroom work can be challenging as data collection methods. However, this study was not meant to generalize to all contexts, but to raise questions about my own teaching and generate questions for other teacher researchers about reading.

During the Spring 2017 semester, I designed a genre-based pedagogy course that connected reading and writing for a 4-credit basic writing course at a large public Southwestern university with a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designation from the Dept. of Education. The students were enrolled in this course based on placement scores and met twice a week as a large class and in one 50-minute studio session with half of the class. The studio provided extra support for students' reading and writing skills in a small class setting. Other versions of this first semester sequence do not have the additional studio time. Many scholars have written about how basic writers often "are in need of intensive help with reading" (Horning, 1987, p. 36) and have advocated approaches that connect reading and writing in composition classrooms (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp, 2003; Skomski, 2013). This study was guided by the following questions about reading:

- How does a student's metacognitive awareness of genre change during a genre-based pedagogy course?

- How do students' reading strategies change during a genre-based pedagogy course?

- In what ways, if at all, does a student's perceived metacognitive awareness of genre impact reading practices during the semester?

Although "awareness" is a complicated and tricky term, I discuss this metacognitive awareness of genre in terms of what characteristics of genre students noticed throughout the semester based on their own responses and their perceptions of how this awareness led to conscious decision-making. Learning new material can be categorized in three ways: prior knowledge is missing, incomplete prior knowledge, or conflicting with prior knowledge (Carey, 1991, as cited in Chi, 2008). All students entered the class with prior knowledge about genre, and their views were "enriched and expanded" (Johns, 2002, p. 237). In order to understand this change, I looked at which characteristics of genre students used to enrich their prior knowledge about genre.

The genre-based curriculum drew from multiple genre theories discussed above as we discussed specific text structures of genres but also focused on genres as tools to accomplish a social action within discourse communities. To further students' understanding of genre, they completed the following major writing assignments presented in Table 1.

Understanding Purpose *continued*

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION
Project 1: Literacy Narrative Students will explore their own literacy "story," their personal engagement with writing, reading, language, and how that has created their identity.
Project 2: Discourse Community Ethnography Building on the previous assignment of individual writing, this unit will broaden students' understanding of how groups and communities influence readers, writers, and texts.
Project 3: Academic Discourse Community Analysis In this unit, we will further discuss the ideas of genre and discourse community and apply this understanding to academic settings. In this assignment, students will take two assignment sheets from at least 3 classes they are currently taking in order to understand the different expectations that instructors have about writing in each of those courses.
Project 4: Collaborative Report In this assignment, students will take what they have learned from the Academic Writing unit and create a class report compiling all the information from everyone's papers. We will choose a relevant audience for this report and discuss the way language is used when writing in this particular genre.
Project 5: Final Reflection For this final assignment, students will reflect on the ideas we have discussed all semester and make their own conclusions about how they will "transfer" that knowledge throughout their academic, personal, and public lives.
Daily Reading and Writing Reflection Assignments These assignments have two sections. First, students describe how they read the assigned reading: students' process before reading, what happened while reading (for example, looking up unknown vocabulary), define purposes for reading. The purpose of this section is to reflect on how the process of reading might change depending on the purpose and the genre of the text. Second, students briefly discuss the content of the reading—what questions they had, what they found interesting or confusing. This section is meant to be a preparation for the next day's class discussion.
Studio Activities

Table 1 Assignment Descriptions for Basic Writing Course

Understanding Purpose *continued*

Informed consent was obtained from students by a colleague, so I did not know which students had agreed to participate until the end of the semester in order to avoid showing any favoritism toward students who chose to participate in the study. Of the eleven who consented to be in the study, eight completed the course and the majority of assignments including 3 surveys about readings, 3 major essay assignments with cover letters, and end-of-semester reflections. A pseudonym was assigned to each student, and data was inductively coded and then categorized in tables for each student.

Students' Prior Theories about Genre

As a starting point, students at the beginning of the semester were asked to define genre and give some examples. All eight students defined genre as a category or type of book, movie, television show, or song. Students gave examples of horror, romance, comedy, poetry, science fiction, jazz, hip hop, and country. No students mentioned sociorhetorical aspects of genre such as audience, context, or purpose.

The majority of the students in this class arrived with relatively simple genre theories, but expanded their definitions over the semester. While few of the students mention sociorhetorical aspects of genre in their definitions at the end of the semester, all students in their major writing assignments demonstrated a growing awareness including social aspects of genre such as audience, context, and purpose. Their definitions of genre were "broadened" or expanded beyond thinking only of literary, movie, or music categories.

Relationship between Genre, Purpose, and Reading Strategies

Purposes shape genres. For example, if a writer wants to write about solving a crime, then she writes a mystery. The situation often calls for a certain kind of genre to fit the prescribed purpose in a writing situation. But this purpose is different when we think of reading particular genres where a reader's purpose also shapes the way a genre is read. The genre has already been prescribed by the author, so the reader needs to determine another purpose for reading the text that may or may not be shaped by the particular genre alone. A reader's purpose is also shaped by the role the text plays within a particular context and the reader's motivations and goals. These factors also influence what strategies a reader may use while reading.

Students' expanded definitions of genre impacted their reading practices throughout the semester. Because the CWPA recommends that students should be able to "gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes," students were given a survey about purpose, genre, and reading strategies after the following reading selections: Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue," Ann Johns' "Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice: Membership, Conflict, and Diversity," and sections of Dan Melzer's book *Assignments Across the Curriculum*. These were chosen as they represent different genres and types of writing and provided ways for students to practice multiple strategies including prepping a reading space, looking up background information about the author or content, taking notes, looking up unknown words, etc. (survey questions with the list of reading strategies and common purposes are included in Appendix A).

Knowing the Purpose Influences Reading Strategies

When reading "Mother Tongue," I let students know that they would be writing their own literacy narrative and one of their purposes for reading was to pay attention to the specific language strategies that Tan was using throughout the narrative. When asked whether knowing the purpose influenced the strategies used while reading all nine students responded in the affirmative. One student responded, "it made me read it more thoroughly." Another said, "Yes, I knew that I would be writing something similar for class, so it really helped me pick up on the language and genre. It also helped me think of ways I could structure my own short story."

After the Johns' reading, four students claimed that knowing the purpose influenced their reading strategies, two responded negatively, and one student was unsure.

After completing the Melzer selection, the number of purposes students identified increased with the eight students selecting 65 total purposes. All eight students selected preparing for class discussion, seven selected applying new knowledge, six selected understanding course content, understanding genre specific informa-

Understanding Purpose *continued*

tion, learning/using specific disciplinary ways of writing, and understanding research.

Two students responded that knowing the purpose did not influence the strategies they used when they read. One student said, "I don't think knowing the purpose has ever really influenced my strategies because regardless I am reading it to broaden my knowledge on genres." Six students did connect knowing the purpose to influencing strategies they used while they read. Of those six, three specifically mentioned a class-related purpose. For example, one student said, "It helped me think of questions about the text which could help me while writing my essay and it helped me summarize key points to use in my writing assignment as well."

Knowing the Genre Influences Knowing the Purpose

Students were also asked about whether knowing the genre was helpful for them in determining a purpose. After reading Amy Tan, five students responded that knowing the genre was helpful while four responded negatively. One student responded, "No, the reason is because I was more interested with the purpose than the genre." Another student responded, "Yes, because knowing the genre helps by understanding what the purpose is by giving a flow and specific direction." In this first reading, students were trying to understand the author's purpose for writing and how that influenced the specific genre, but knowing the author's purpose for writing was not always as important as knowing the purpose for how the text would be used in the class.

While reading Ann Johns, knowing the genre had mixed results in influencing the purpose for the reading. Three responded that it was important because it gave the reader "something to look out for like key terms and bolded words." Three said no, and one was uncertain. One student said that reading the text was part of the class discussion, so the genre did not impact how he read it.

After the Dan Melzer selection, three students did not think that knowing the genre influenced determining a purpose. One student admitted, "I personally determine the purpose when reading the text." Five students did think knowing the genre was important because it allowed students to "look for key facts to use in writing

assignments," put more "purpose on how to conduct a study and learn more about how much work you need to put in to get accurate results," and because it "helps you know that the author is trying to inform you of something."

Knowing the Genre Influences Reading Strategies

With Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue," the nine students who completed the survey used 63 different reading strategies. When students completed the text by Ann Johns, the eight students who completed the survey used 70 strategies. The number of strategies used by the students when reading the Melzer increased for this reading with the eight students selecting 100 strategies. The most used strategies were specifying a purpose for reading, specifying the author's purpose for writing, and looking up background info about the author.

After reading Johns, five students mentioned that knowing the genre influenced their reading strategies. One student said, "Yes, because knowing the text was an academic article made me want to look up the text before reading so I can have a better understanding of the text."

After reading Dan Melzer, four students did not think knowing the genre was important in determining strategies, but there was more confusion for this response. One student remarked, "I don't think knowing the genre influenced the strategies I used to read the text because I wasn't even too sure of what the genre is of the article." Four students responded that knowing the genre did influence the strategies used. One student said, "I think knowing the genre influenced the strategies I used to read the text. It caused me to look for relationships between ideas and recognize types of evidence used." Another stated that knowing the genre was "research" put her in a different "mindset, a learning mindset." Another stated that she took the genre more seriously because she knew it was research.

The students in this study seem to have arrived in college with narrow definitions of genre based primarily on categories such as jazz music, horror movies, etc. While their understanding was broadened to include academic texts as genres, they still continued to define genre through the semester based on structure. Defining

Understanding Purpose *continued*

genres by structure is not wholly detrimental, as it did allow students to become more aware of linguistic strategies used in various texts. For example, when reading "Mother Tongue," students noticed that dialogue with quotation marks was used throughout the narrative, Tan addresses the audience as "you," and uses "I." They also discussed the first line of the narrative: "I am not a scholar of English or literature." This was contrasted with the first sentence of Melzer's book:

> In "The Future of Writing Across the Curriculum: Consensus and Research," Chris Anson (1993) traces the history of research in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), from early evidence of writing across disciplines that was mostly anecdotal to current research that emphasizes case study and ethnographic methods. (p. 1)

Students also looked at structural aspects such as the use of headings within texts, the use of citations, and even sentence length and were able to compare these differences between the different texts we read. Although students became more aware of the language and structural features used within the genres, they still had difficulty naming the genres throughout the semester on the surveys. For example, students referred to "Mother Tongue" as a narrative, academic paper, article, literacy article, and personal. They included a larger variety of texts as genres but were uncertain of what they should be called. Throughout the semester, as students' genre theories evolved, they still tended to define genres by their structure.

Grabe (2002) further discusses the complications of "naming" genres by saying that the research paper, the take-home exam, and the in-class essay are academic genres "assumed to fit certain expectations by the assigning teachers but which are sufficiently loose with respect to purpose, reader-writer roles, content, formal structure, register, and cultural expectations…" (p. 251). Names and expectations of genres may be unfamiliar to many students, but being able to name a specific genre may not be as important for students when thinking about their purpose and strategies. Even naming the text as something like "academic" was enough for some students to then determine strategies and a purpose.

Focusing on genre structure can help students become more aware readers (Dymock, 1999; Goldman

and Rakestraw, 2000), but the structure is just a part of the complicated idea of genre, which also includes more sociorhetorical aspects such as context, audience, and purpose. These aspects are also connected to students' awareness in choosing strategies to use while reading. Talking about strategies was an explicit part of the classroom discussion in this study. Students were given a list of possible strategies to use while reading, and we often referenced that sheet during the units as we talked about the reading process. I also modeled some of the strategies during our studio time in a small group. As the texts moved from personal (Literacy Narrative) into more unfamiliar academic genres, students used more strategies, possibly due to the fact that students possessed less formal schemata knowledge (knowledge of a text's organizational structures). This hindered how students were able to predict what might happen in the text and required more strategies as they continued to build this formal schemata knowledge.

Connecting the reading to their writing assignments was only one purpose and students had many purposes while reading an assigned text. Students needed some discussion and direction in this area. Chloe says, "I think that everyone should connect the talk about reading and writing because of the skills I gained throughout the semester, I noticed I was writing faster, I had many more ideas for my paper and I could connect articles from the assigned readings to my assignment" (Final Reflection).

These results about purpose, strategies, and genres demonstrate just how complicated reading genres can be. For example, for the last major reading assignment (*Assignments Across the Curriculum*), students did not all agree that knowing the genre influenced the strategies they used, but it seems they were thinking of genre only in terms of structural elements and not in a sociorhetorical sense. But that idea did get mentioned as students thought about their purpose(s) for reading the text and many had purposes that came out of explicit class instructions or classroom activities, and students used multiple strategies throughout the text.

A metacognitive awareness of genre needs to include how the text might be used in the class, what the purpose is for reading the text, and how multiple strategies might be used during the same text. In each of these reading responses, more students agreed that knowing the purpose influenced the strategies they used while reading. Having

Understanding Purpose *continued*

a purpose for each of these areas is important, but students may need help determining why the text is being assigned and how the information will be used within the class. This often needs to come from the instructor.

Students' Metacognitive Awareness of Genre and Reading Practices

In addition to the surveys that students completed, they also completed a reflection about how their definition of genre influenced their reading practices during the second major writing assignment. Many students mentioned that their definition of genre had been broadened beyond thinking of genre in terms of literary categories. This seemed to impact the way students read because they were thinking about the texts we were reading as genres. Many students still thought of genre as a way to group similar items, but now the texts we were reading were thought of as genres. Paying attention to the structure of the genres we read was a common response among the students. Maya said that her definition of genre allowed her to "pin point parts of the reading, and approach the readings differently based on what the reading was after" (Writing Assignment 2 Cover Letter). Sofia mentioned that her broadened definition of genre" helped [her] notice the genre for the readings in this unit." She did this by paying attention to the structure of the genres and structured her paper in a similar way. Having a broadened definition also helped Isabella to determine strategies for reading. She says, "I was able to decipher the genre of the text and go about reading it from there, whether it was skimming, looking for bolded or italicized words, or reading every word" (Writing Assignment 2 Cover Letter).

At the end of the third major writing assignment, Aaliyah stated, "The definition of genre has influenced my reading process by allowing me to fathom guidelines, or sets of rules which can direct a form of work into a preferred, or specific style, or classification" (Writing Assignment 3 Cover Letter). In her writing assignment, she also discussed how those guidelines vary by context. Sofia also mentioned sociorhetorical features of genre, discussing how a genre is "called for in a particular situation." She applied this knowledge to determining the genre we were reading. Simone defined genre in terms of "writing styles" and, as she read, she paid attention to the "informal or formal" writing style of the genre. Reading

to connect to the next essay was still common and Charlotte said her definition of genre gave her "an idea of what to look for. Throughout the readings, [she] looked for different styles and structures to hopefully help [her] write [her] paper" (Writing Assignment 3 Cover Letter).

Sofia's definition throughout the course became more sociorhetorical in nature, but the structural aspect of genre still influenced her reading practices. She says, "I found it very useful to first look over the text and its structural formatting and then identify the genre and purpose. While reading I started to make notes on specific points of the content, looking to connect them to the story in the book as well as my own background" (Final Reflection). Simone also discussed the social nature of genres saying, "Learning about the discourse communities will help me organize my thoughts, and organize what the genre is and how I can approach the reading in the first place" (Final Reflection).

This seems to be a common theme throughout the semester. Some students' definitions grew more sociorhetorical in nature, but almost all students focused on the structural aspects of the texts and how that influenced their reading practices. This structural awareness of the genres read impacted the use of the texts in the classroom as many students mentioned that they were thinking about the essay they would write and were looking for similar ways of using language or structuring their essay. Perhaps an awareness of structure is where students need to start genre knowledge, but in combination with more sociorhetorical views of genre that help students to recognize that reading varies by context. This is an interesting theme throughout the responses as it gives an insight into students' recursive genre understanding: students know they will be writing an essay for the class, they pay attention to the genres we read to find structural and languages cues, and they try to mimic those in their own writing. For example, after making a list of linguistic strategies used in literacy narratives, including the strategies listed such as dialogue, using "I," and addressing the reader as "you," students then decided if they wanted to mimic similar strategies when writing their own literacy narratives. Students may not know that one purpose for reading is to pay attention to the structure and linguistic formatting so that they might mimic similar strategies in their own writing. This may or may not be a purpose for reading depending on the kind of writing assignment

Understanding Purpose *continued*

that students will be using the text to accomplish. Students don't necessarily begin with the classroom situation knowing what kind of language the situation calls for, but try to mimic that through their reading practices.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of the semester, students in this class became aware of many facets of genre including an awareness of how a genre is structured, the kind of language that is used within a genre, determining the purpose for reading a genre, and also a purpose for writing in a particular genre. Many students had an increased awareness of specific sociorhetorical aspects of genre such as audience awareness and a genre's use in context. This raised metacognitive awareness of genre influenced how students read particular genres, and this understanding influenced the *way* they read particular texts.

By focusing on both structure and purpose within a given context, students move toward developing both formal schemata and building content schemata. In addition to considering the author's purpose for writing the text, students need to take into account their purpose for reading the text in a particular classroom. When students receive a text, they need to be able to ask themselves about generic elements such as structure and tone, but also about the purpose of reading the text within that particular classroom. For example, are they mimicking the particular kind of language from the text in their own writing? Are they finding a quote to use in their own writing? Are they being quizzed on the content of the text? Or all of these purposes? Because the

same text might be used for different purposes within different classrooms, instructors in all disciplines have the responsibility to guide students. Instructors in all disciplines can help students read more efficiently by, first, helping students determine the purpose(s) for reading the assigned text. Students need to know why they are reading the text and what the intended outcome of the text is within the classroom. This can include the kinds of information that they will be looking for as they read. Second, they can guide students in recognizing typical structures of genres they'll be reading. Third, they can offer suggestions for reading strategies that will be effective in fulfilling the purposes. In this way, students can begin to connect their genre knowledge with rhetorical purposes and strategies.

Students should think of how particular genres shape their purposes within various contexts as readers while also thinking of the purposes for writing within various courses and of the readers of those particular genres. Reading and writing are both iterative and connected processes with multiple purposes at each step. A student's metacognitive awareness of genre can impact reading awareness as students become conscious of their reading practices in relation to various texts across contexts. Using genre-based frameworks that focus on structures, purposes, and contexts may also help students as they develop content schemata. Both of these areas are needed as students become more proficient readers.

Understanding Purpose *continued*

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Understanding Purpose *continued*

APPENDIX A: ENGL 101A SURVEY QUESTIONS
(administered 3 times during the semester)

1. Your Name

2. What is the text?

3. What is the text's genre?

4. How do you know what genre it is?

5. What was your purpose(s) for reading this text (check all that apply)

   - Understanding course content or learn something new
   - Apply new knowledge
   - Prepare for class discussion
   - Engage in critical thinking
   - Synthesize information
   - Understand genre specific information
   - Learn/use new vocab
   - Learn/use specific disciplinary ways of writing
   - Demonstrate knowledge through writing assignment
   - Understand research
   - Conduct research
   - Respond to the text in a writing assignment
   - Find quotations or specific language to use in writing assignment
   - Other

6. How did you determine the purpose(s)?

7. What strategies did you use to read the text? (check all that apply)

   - Specified a purpose for reading
   - Specific the author's purpose for writing
   - Prepped area/made a plan/time management
   - Previewed text
   - Looked up background info about author
   - Looked up background info about content
   - Decided on genre/looked for specific genre features
   - Predicted the contents of the text
   - Posed questions about the text
   - Checked predictions while reading
   - Connected text to background knowledge and experience
   - Summarized passages
   - Made inferences
   - Connected one part of the text to another
   - Connected text to another text
   - Connected text to own life experience
   - Noticed language patterns within the text
   - Noticed text structure and characteristics of the genre
   - Re-read
   - Guessed meaning of new word from context
   - Looked up definition of unknown word
   - Used discourse markers and phrases to see relationships between ideas (for example, "however,"
   - Checked comprehension
   - Recognized types of evidence used
   - Identified difficulties
   - Critiqued the author
   - Critiqued the text
   - Reflected on what was learned from the text
   - Annotated the document
   - Took notes on another sheet of paper
   - Other

Understanding Purpose (Appendix A) *continued*

8. What was interesting about the text? What do you remember?

9. Do you think knowing the genre influenced the strategies you used to read the text? If so, how?

10. Do you think that knowing your purpose influenced the strategies you used to read the text? If so, how?

11. Do you think that knowing the genre influenced determining the purpose for reading the text? If so, how?

TEACHING REPORTS

An Assignment Model for Teaching Students to Write from Sources

—Elizabeth Kleinfeld and Abby Wright

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Abstract

Faculty across the disciplines assign research papers but are often disappointed that students do not demonstrate engagement with a larger conversation in their papers. The authors, a professor and former student, describe an activity to help students writing from sources better understand the rhetorical aspects of source citation. They then discuss a writing assignment that delves more deeply into the rhetorical aspects of source citation and analyze the student author's experience of completing the assignment. The student identified four problematic patterns of source use: crediting a source for her own idea, overreliance on direct quotation, confusion about what counts as "common knowledge," and unclear citation boundaries. The article ends with a discussion of how instruction on and grading of students' source use could be modified to emphasize authorial power and responsibility.

Keywords

citation, source use, writing pedagogy

An Assignment Model for Teaching Students to Write from Sources

The research paper has long been a mainstay of college courses across the disciplines; in fact, Douglass Brent (2013) traces it back to the 1920s. Brent argues that having students "writ[e] from sources is one way of integrating students into a research-based discourse community" (p. 39), and indeed, faculty often cite as a key reason for assigning research papers that they help students think like someone in the discipline (Schwegler and Shamoon, 1982). Research paper assignments typically ask students to synthesize and properly document a number of sources (Hood 2010). Brent notes that research papers tend to have a "relatively stable set of conventions," that "these conventions are not merely formal—where to place the quotation marks and how to arrange a reference list—but also structural and procedural—how to use the ideas of others to construct an argument of one's own" (2013, p. 36). In highlighting the structural and procedural aspects of the research paper, Brent brings attention to the aspects of research writing that challenge students and urges instructors to acknowledge the complexity of what they are asking students to do. Often, faculty themselves are immersed in research activity, incorporating sources into their writing on a regular, if not daily, basis; this immersion can render the complexities that Brent highlights invisible to faculty.

An Assignment Model *continued*

Faculty often are dismayed, then, when student writing does not indicate engagement with a larger conversation. This failure to engage with a larger conversation is typical, however. Sandra Jamieson (2016), co-PI of the Citation Project, a nationwide study of student source citation practices, notes that this lack of engagement is reflected in the majority of the papers that the Citation Project examined. As faculty across the disciplines will continue to assign research papers, they need to ask how can they help students use sources more effectively. Howard and Jamieson (2014) suggest that instruction should "focus students' attention on the purposes of research more than on its mechanics" (p. 235). Schick (2011) and Fister (1993), among others, also urge teachers to shift the focus to what source citations do rather than how they are formatted. This shift to framing source citation as rhetorical moves will help students understand source citation as participation in a larger disciplinary conversation.

In this article, we first describe a classroom activity that Elizabeth uses in all her classes, from introductory first year writing classes to advanced rhetoric classes, to help students understand the rhetorical dimensions of source citation. Then, we discuss an assignment that aims to help students understand source citation as an ethos-developing move, a way to create and build social capital, and a way to signal the nuances of disciplinary conversations. Shirley Rose (1999) identifies these moves as the ones that expert writers make when writing from sources. This assignment easily can be adapted for many different kinds of courses, and for students at the introductory college level and for graduate students alike. Along the lines of Haller's (2010) case study of three students' source use, this case study offers a detailed look at how one student navigated integrating sources into a research paper, providing insights into students' practices and potential pedagogical responses.

What Traditional Source Citation Instruction Obscures

Traditional instruction presents source citation as being straightforward and fairly mechanical: cite sources clearly and accurately, with the underlying threat that to do anything less than that is plagiarism. Kleinfeld's (2018) examination of syllabi and assignments related to writing from sources shows that the majority of these documents emphasize the mechanics of source citation over other aspects. A large body of work (see, for example, Valentine, 2001; Raven, 2012; Jamieson, 2013) documents the struggles of students to use sources in their writing as expected by their instructors.

This research, along with the results of Phase 1 of the Citation Project, indicate that students are not making sophisticated decisions about how to integrate sources into their writing. The Citation Project found that students rely much more heavily on quotation and paraphrase than on summary (Jamieson and Howard, 2011); when we consider that summary moves the farthest from the original text and therefore requires the most finesse and confidence, we can see this finding as evidence that students are perhaps overly cautious (and maybe even afraid) to transform sources into their own words.

Viewing source citation simply as a matter of following a format obscures the rich rhetorical activity taking place when a source is cited. When a source is cited, the reader's attention is drawn to the source; depending upon how the source is cited (whether it is summarized, quoted, paraphrased, or alluded to) and the context the author provides for the cited material, the reader's understanding of the source material is nudged in a particular direction. How the writer chooses to refer to the source will have major implications on how the reader interprets the source and the information the author draws from it.

Examining source citation through the lens of genre theory, which emphasizes what particular features of a text do, allows us to see source citation as a complex and nuanced activity, which accounts for the many judgment calls sophisticated writers find themselves making when writing from sources. Understanding source citations as representing, reflecting, and enabling social relationships allows us to acknowledge the complexity of what writers, whether they are students or scholars, do when they cite sources. Scholars of information literacy have long asked instructors of writing to prompt students to consider how their source use reflects upon them as authors (Fister, 1993; McMillen & Hill, 2004; Purdy & Walker, 2013). Instructors of writing and instructors in other disciplines who assign writing, however, often wonder how exactly they might do this.

An Assignment Model *continued*

Creating a Safe Space for Learning

Plagiarism is an unfortunate and distracting elephant in the room during conversations about source use. Because inadequate source citation often is seen as plagiarism, conversations about plagiarism sometimes are shrouded in student paranoia and instructor suspicion. This situation is made worse by the emphasis on the consequences of plagiarism in syllabi, course materials, and lectures. Indeed, Elizabeth has heard faculty praise plagiarism detection software for instilling "a fear factor" in students. We cannot think of another example in which creating fear in the classroom is identified as a legitimate teaching strategy. This leads to a serious problem: much of the complexity of what sources do, what we do when we cite them, and what source citations themselves do, has been minimized in our conversations, making students intimidated and confused by citing and paraphrasing. What we offer is a low-stakes way for students to consider their own source use.

A safe learning environment allows students to make mistakes. However, source citation instruction often is taught in opposition to this concept. When a student experiments with commas and it goes badly, the student loses points. The stakes can be much higher, however, for the student whose experimentation with source citation goes wrong, as an accusation of plagiarism can mean failing the course and perhaps even expulsion from the university. How, then, can students learn to exercise authority and ownership over their own use of sources? How can students learn to use discretion in choosing and using sources?

We are interested in how conversations between faculty and students about source citation can be transformed by attending to the rhetorical situation in which the source citation takes place and the contingencies upon which the source citation relies. When faculty examine with students how source citations function in different genres, how the ways we refer to sources can steer readers toward particular ways of seeing both our sources and us, our conversations and understandings become much richer and nuanced. The conversation shifts from "here is the template for a works cited entry," to "how does this source citation direct readers' attention?" and "how does this source citation reflect upon the author?" Teaching source citation as rhetorical moves emphasizes what source citations *do* rather than what they *are* or must be.

What would it look like if instructors and students had conversations about the best ways to cite a source?[1] In our classroom experiences—Elizabeth's as an instructor and Abby's as a student—we have seen this type of question met most often with a definitive answer of some kind, sometimes differing from instructor to instructor, muddling a student's understanding of source use concepts and protocols even more. One instructor might respond to a question about citing a source that is cited within another source by referring the student to the original source; another instructor might point the student to the parenthetical reference format for citing a source within a source. Both instructors in this scenario have given the student accurate information about source citation, but neither has unpacked the implications of these two different approaches. In the next section, we take up the question of "what is the best way to cite a source?" by describing a class activity that can be used in any class.

A Simple Activity for Any Class and an Extended Assignment

The seemingly simple question of what is the best way to cite a source is difficult to answer because there are a number of rhetorical options for any rhetorical dilemma that could be employed, each with different consequences. Different disciplines may have specific conventions to follow, such as referring to sources in a particular verb tense. Genre may play a role, as well; for instance, a research paper uploaded to a course website that mimics an open-source online journal may integrate hyperlinks to source material. Beyond the concerns of disciplinary and genre conventions, however, is the fact that how a writer cites a source conveys information beyond what the source says.

For example, say we want to cite a passage from Rachel Knaizer's (2012) chapter "Finding the Source: The Roots and Problems of Plagiarism" in the book *Critical Conversations about Plagiarism*, edited by Michael Donnelly,

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[1] *It is worth noting that our co-authorship exemplifies the kinds of conversations we would like to see more of between faculty and students regarding source use—and other aspects of writing. As co-authors, we have positioned ourselves as having different yet equally valuable expertise on student source use. As one reviewer noted, our co-authorship is significant to this project.*

An Assignment Model *continued*

Rebecca Ingalls, Tracy Ann Morse, Joanna Castner Post, and Anne Meade Stockdell-Giesler: "Writers, because they are engaging in discourse, do not simply record their thoughts but also try to place their ideas in comparison to other ideas that have been spoken or published before" (p. 155). We have many options, depending on how we want to position ourselves in relation to what Knaizer says. Here are just three ways of doing this:

1. Knaizer (2012) reminds us that a writer's responsibilities include positioning their own ideas in relation to the ideas of others.

2. Knaizer (2012) moves us away from the idea that writers are "simply record[ing] their thoughts;" they also "place their ideas in comparison to other ideas" (p. 155).

3. According to Knaizer (2012), "Writers, because they are engaging in discourse, do not simply record their thoughts but also try to place their ideas in comparison to other ideas that have been spoken or published before" (p. 155).

While each of these options technically is correct in terms of its use of quotation marks and source citation, each one emphasizes a different aspect of Knaizer's message. The first example frames writing as a conversation about ideas. The second example emphasizes a rejection of the idea that writing is primarily about capturing the writer's ideas. The third example simply presents Knaizer's words without any framing. The first two examples signal the writer's relationship to Knaizer, while the third eschews articulating any type of affiliation with Knaizer. Experienced writers can sort through these options and make a rhetorically informed choice, but less experienced writers may not even recognize that they have choices in this situation. Students generally will default to option 3, which presents the source material as uncontested and unmotivated, thus, as Amy England (2008) points

out, exposing their "novice status and thus diminish[ing] their credibility or authority with readers" (p. 110).

Following this model, there are two activities that easily can be done in a class in any discipline by using an article from a relevant scholarly journal. One activity asks students to summarize or paraphrase a key idea from the article and then come up with three different ways of introducing it to show different stances toward the material, like what was demonstrated above. Another activity might have students locate a source citation within the article and analyze how the author has positioned him- or herself in relation to the source. In addition to helping students build their source-citing skills, these types of activities promote closer reading of assigned articles.

The activities described above can be done in a class period or less. For a more extended exploration of source use and citation, we offer the following description of an assignment that Elizabeth assigned, and then Abby completed. In Fall 2014, Abby enrolled in an upper-division class that Elizabeth taught on authorship studies. The course examined Western concepts of authorship and originality, touching on topics that included copyright and intellectual property and law, collaborative authorship, theories of invention, and contemporary challenges to the idea of solitary authorship, including the Internet, the writing workshop, writing centers, and workplace writing practices. This course gave Elizabeth a key opportunity to explore source use with students. Students were exposed to the methodology of the Citation Project and citation analysis and findings, including that students tend to use only the first few pages of a source and over-rely on quotation.

Elizabeth followed up these reading and discussions with an assignment in which students analyzed their use of sources, both cited and uncited, in a piece of writing they did for another class, past or present.[2] The assignment asked students to identify moments of intertextual-

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[2] *The assignment was inspired by Paul Parker's suggestion at the beginning of his essay, "From Rules to Judgment: Exploring the Plagiarism Threshold in Academic Writing," that students study a piece of their own writing for patterns of source use. Parker's idea to ground student analysis of source use in their own writing appealed to her because it relies on Writing about Writing (WAW) concepts first suggested by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs in "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning "First-Year Composition" as "Introduction to Writing Studies." In that article, Wardle and Downs argue that first year writing courses should make writing research itself the subject of study. Since that article's publication in 2007, others (see, for example, the 2019 edited collection, Next Steps: New Directions for/in Writing about Writing, edited by Barb Bird, Doug Downs, I. Moriah McCracken, and Jan Rieman) have extended the WAW concept beyond first year writing.*

An Assignment Model *continued*

ity and cited source use. A purpose of the assignment was to help students understand their own writing as a challenge to the notion of solitary authorship. In thinking about their use of intertextuality, students were encouraged to keep in mind Bazerman's (2004) comment that "We create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us" (p. 83). Many of these former texts have been so thoroughly internalized by us that we no longer even recognize them as being textual in origin, but rather treat them as common knowledge and adages.

Students then made a list with numbers that corresponded to the numbered incidents of source use in the paper they were analyzing. For each instance of source use, students identified the type of source use, using terms familiar to many college students, such as summary, paraphrase, and quotation, as well as the term Rebecca Moore Howard (1993) coined to describe some types of attempted paraphrase: patchwrite. Elizabeth instructed students that if the terms they knew did not adequately capture what they were seeing, they should explain the source use as descriptively as possible. Students used the Citation Project's (Jamieson and Howard, 2011) definitions for summary, paraphrase, quotation, patchwriting, and copying:

- Summary: Restating and compressing the main points of an entire text . . . by at least 50% and using 20% or less of the language from that passage.

- Paraphrase: Restating a phrase, clause, or one or two sentences while using no more than 20% of the language of the source.

- Quotation and Copying: A passage in a student text that is (a) copied exactly and (b) marked as quotation, either by using quotation marks or by block indenting

- Patchwriting: Restating a phrase, clause, or one or more sentences while staying close to the language or syntax of the source.

With these definitions and various source types in mind, students wrote a 4-6 page analysis of the trends and patterns they noticed in their source use and reflected upon what they would do differently if they were to revise the assignment today.

This assignment could be used effectively in any upper-division course that requires a research paper, and it can be modified to fit a variety of disciplines. For example, in a philosophy course, students might be asked to examine a paper they wrote in another philosophy course, or in an education course, students might be asked to work with a paper and focus on moments where they see their understanding of source use developing. In both instances, students then might write a reflection on how those moments of development could help them as scholars and teachers.

Abby's Experience

Abby's analysis of her source citations in a paper she wrote in a music appreciation class demonstrates some of the problems that a traditional approach to source citation can breed. Abby had taken the course several years earlier. Though the course primarily focused on the history and attributes of classical music, students could write about any topic related to music for their final research paper. Abby's recollection is that the instructions around source use consisted of part of one class period devoted to explaining aspects of MLA style and a recommendation to refer to the Purdue OWL website for more information.

The source citation instruction Abby had received in the past had left her with the impression that it was better to rely on what others had said than on presenting her own original opinions or analysis. In fact, one of the guiding principles she brought to her research writing was that if she wanted to include her own opinions or analysis, she had to find a source that said something very similar to show "an expert" had already said it. She had learned that one purpose of citing sources was to show readers that she had done research. Abby sometimes would sprinkle quotations into papers to fulfill project requirements, making quotations merely decorative, rather than having them provide meaningful contributions to her content. Some teachers wanted her to show that she had used "the best sources," while other teachers seemed to accept any sources. Still others required sources to come from either the library or the internet, or they required a certain number of sources to come from specific locations. As her analysis of her music appreciation paper shows, she had not learned that a purpose of citing sources was to develop an idea or add

An Assignment Model *continued*

richness to an argument. She found writing from sources was a confusing practice, with an unclear purpose; creating something "original" by pulling quotes from the work of others seemed contradictory to her.

Abby's paper was 10 pages long and cited 11 sources. In examining the 28 instances of source use in the paper, Abby analyzed four patterns, all of which should be familiar to college students and their instructors: (1) four instances of crediting a source for an idea solely because it expressed—from an "expert's" perspective—a point Abby wanted to make; (2) eight direct quotations, half of which were long, block quotations; (3) five instances in which no source was cited because she considered the information common knowledge at the time she wrote the paper; and (4) unclear boundaries between which ideas came from sources and which from Abby herself.

The first pattern Abby noted is crediting a source for an idea she had. The music appreciation paper exemplifies a frustration Abby repeatedly has felt as a student. To justify including one sentence of her own thought, she has to find three sentences written by others who shared the same or a similar thought. Abby's concern about having to show that others have the same ideas led her to cite fairly generic reference sources several times in her paper.

An example of this comes near the beginning of the paper, in which Abby describes the attributes of rap music and then cites the Wikipedia entry on hip hop music as a source. Abby already knew the attributes of rap music and could have easily written the description in the paper without consulting any sources, but she suspected that her professor would want a source cited. The use of Wikipedia as a source itself can be problematic, with many faculty preferring that more scholarly sources be used. However, the point in this instance is that Abby did not need to cite a source to do what she wanted to do in the paper, which was to simply define rap. When she examined her use of Wikipedia and other generic reference source citations, Abby realized that rather than developing her ethos, they made her sound very much like a student in an introductory course in music appreciation.

Another pattern that marked Abby's source use was over-reliance on direct quotation. Consistent with Citation Project findings, Abby's paper included many direct quotations, with eight direct quotations in ten pages, including four lengthy, block quotations. Two of these occur on page five of the paper, one after the other. Here are the two paragraphs in their entirety:

> John McWhorter, a professor at California's Berkeley University, states that the hiphop culture, "retards black success by the reinforcement of hindering stereotypes and by teaching young blacks that a thuggish adversarial stance is the properly authentic response to a presumptively racist society" (qtd. in Williams 2004).

> In 2004, Bill Cosby, a famous African American actor, told a group of black activists in Chicago, "Let me tell you something . . . Your dirty laundry [black youth] gets out of school at 2:30 every day, it's cursing and calling each other [the N-word] as they're walking up and down the street. They think they're hip. They can't read. They can't write. They're laughing and giggling, and they're going nowhere" (qtd. in Harris 2004).

These two quotations each make up the bulk of its paragraph and there is no unpacking of the quotations. Both quotations are presented and assumed to be factual. In the first paragraph, there is no discussion of alternative points of view to McWhorter's, presenting his view that "hiphop culture 'retards black success'" as uncontroversial. Reading the paper years later, Abby wishes she had done more critical thinking about these quotations. At the time she wrote the paper, however, she had a different concern: she wanted to paraphrase McWhorter's words, but she feared she would not be able to capture the exact meaning by changing their original form.

She recalls the origin of her caution: her instructor had told the class that in paraphrases and summaries, writers should not use any of the author's own words. Abby had asked, "What if we can't find different words?" and the instructor had responded, "Well, how many words don't have a synonym?" With this conversation ringing in her ears, Abby tried to do a word-by-word rewriting of McWhorter's passage—what many might consider a deliberate patchwrite—and found that because she could not find accurate synonyms for some of the words, she resorted to using a direct quotation.

An Assignment Model *continued*

It also is notable that two sources were used very frequently throughout the paper, with two entire pages of the ten-page paper drawn from them. Abby's objective was to show that she had used source material; using a variety of source material or using source material judiciously did not figure into her thinking at the time that she wrote the paper.

Another interesting use of over-quotation was in the form of the cautious use of quotation marks in paraphrases to denote borrowed words. She was careful to credit any words that were the same as the original, including "mid-to-late 70s" and "culture." She remembers considering writing "1975-1979" in place of quoting "mid-to-late 70s," but thought that sounded too much like a history textbook, which she felt would have been inappropriate for the audience and purpose of that assignment. So with paraphrasing "mid-to-late 70s" not a viable option, the dilemma remaining was to quote or not to quote. Because Abby had a sense of fear of being "caught" plagiarizing, she erred on the side of extreme caution. Not only was Abby not prepared to work out these subtleties, but the rules of citation she had internalized informed her that if she had not added quotation marks around the phrase, she would have been directly copying four words in a row (five if the preceding article "the" was counted), which would have constituted border-line plagiarism. It never occurred to Abby to question this, as this seemed to be a matter of quotation marks, synonyms, and MLA style.

Another subtlety Abby was unprepared to navigate is confusion about what counts as "common knowledge." Her paper included five instances in which no source was cited because she considered the information common knowledge at the time she wrote the paper. However, after taking the Concepts of Authorship class, she suspected they warranted citations. One example is a reference in the paper to Christian rap:

> While I am fully aware that not all rap songs convey negative messages and behaviors, such as "Christian rap" songs, gangsta rap is much more common and is what I'm referring to here.

In examining this passage, Abby felt she should have explained the differences between Christian rap and gangsta rap, which might have entailed citing sources to go beyond the most basic of explanations of the differences.

In another instance of source use, she makes a strong claim about classical music: "Its structure is complex, its creators are intellectual, and its sound is impressive, not to mention many of the great composers, such as Beethoven, lived tragic lives and have much to show for it." Looking back, it is unclear whether she assumed that this was a common opinion in the discourse community of musicians (in which case she was correct to not quote or cite it), or whether it was a personal opinion. This distinction is important.

In another instance, there appears to be another one-sentence summary, gleaned from a much larger article that claims that MC-ing "did not require much talent to get started." Abby could not substantiate the claim when she went back to the original source, so the statement may be an instance of her interjection being unintentionally presented as fact, likely as a means to bolster her own credibility. It could have also been a misinterpretation of some part of the article, and/or her biases influencing how she interpreted the information, but long after the fact, there is no way of knowing. Regardless of the oversight, weaknesses like these offer an opportunity for conversation about authorial intent, the purpose of the piece of writing, where the focus should be based on the intent and purpose and how to achieve it the most effectively, while fulfilling the ethical duty writers have to credit their sources.

The final pattern Abby noted in her paper is unclear citation boundaries. When Abby read her paper after several years of distance, she realized that it was often unclear where cited material ended and her own thoughts began. In particular, there was one long paragraph in which she cited a source at its beginning and then later at its end; after rereading this paragraph, Abby now believes she should have included a citation somewhere in its middle to remind readers that the ideas were not coming from her. The paragraph itself is over a full page in length and draws heavily from a published interview with a researcher. Most of the paragraph involves Abby summarizing what the researcher did and paraphrasing the results, but there are a few sentences, such as "[t]here are many reasons for this," that could be seen either as her own thought or that of the researcher. Now, Abby wishes she had written, "Mills suggests that here are many reasons for this," to make it clear that it is the author's thought, not her own, that is being referenced.

An Assignment Model *continued*

Discussion

Abby's use of sources in her paper does what traditional source citation instruction emphasizes—it demonstrates that she did her due diligence. Her source use shows that she conducted research and that she was ethical. When she located original source material and compared it with her paper, she could not find places where exact language of the sources was used in her paper without quotation marks. This does not indicate engagement with a scholarly conversation about rap music or demonstrate interaction with sources. Abby had not used source citations to position sources in relation to herself. Completing this assignment allowed Abby to have an "aha" moment—the realization that she, as an author, *could* position herself in relation to her sources. All of Abby's learning about source use prior to this assignment had emphasized the mechanics of her citations, and so that is where her attention had gone. She had not thought about how her readers might feel about her heavy reliance on just a few sources, for example. When she began to think about what her source use *did* demonstrate, she quickly decided that using source material more judiciously would reflect more positively upon her. In other words, when she thought about her source use rhetorically, her attention went to how her source use helped develop her ethos as an author.

There are some lessons that come from Abby's analysis that can be incorporated into any class, and Elizabeth has used a modified version of this same assignment in several of her other courses, including a first-year writing course and an introductory rhetoric course. In the first-year writing course, students used Bizup's (2008) BEAM model of source use to label how they had used sources. Bizup explains that "writers *rely* on background sources, *interpret* or *analyze* exhibits, *engage* arguments, and *follow* methods" (p. 76). Bizup identifies the four ways writers use sources (background, exhibit, argument, and methods), which he refers to by the acronym BEAM. The italicized terms also indicate what writers do with those sources (rely, interpret or analyze, engage, and follow), and Bizup says that the advantage of thinking about sources in terms of BEAM is that it allows us to focus on what writers do with sources, and how different sources may be used in a research paper.

Both versions of this assignment provide ways of giving students hands on practice with source use, discuss-ing the consequences of different source citation choices, and bringing the source citations of assigned readings into the foreground via deep discussion. When Elizabeth asks fellow writing faculty how they teach source citation, they often tell her they "spend a lot of time talking about the importance of citations." We urge faculty to recognize that "spending a lot of time talking about the importance of citations" is not specific or varied enough to constitute effective instruction. Students need to work with citations in interesting and engaging ways, and lessons and handouts focusing on bibliographic format need to be discarded in favor of activities and discussions conducted in a space that promotes experimentation and learning by making and reflecting upon mistakes.

Once a more engaging pedagogy around source citation is adopted, grading practices then need to be brought into alignment. An instructor cannot teach citation as we have suggested if grading is shaped by such practices as point deductions for a formatting error in an in-text citation. Faculty need to develop more qualitative criteria for grading source use. Elizabeth is currently using two guidelines in her assessments of student source use: whether she can find the sources using the information provided on the references list and how these sources, along with the way they are used, reflect upon the student writer. The first criteria focuses on whether the source citation has done its most basic job—that is, provided a road map for the reader to locate the source. The second gets at what the source citations do.

Teaching source citation as rhetorical moves discussions of source citation out of the realm of rules and formats and, we argue, into the much richer milieu of rhetorical moves, choices, and consequences, pushing students toward practices that acknowledge authorial power and responsibility.

Acknowledgments

An Assignment Model *continued*

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TEACHING REPORTS

The Crowdsourcing Classroom: Engagement in the Age of *Boaty McBoatface*

—Brandie Bohney

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Abstract

Student engagement and participation can be tricky: a few willing classroom participants can dominate discussions with limited perspectives while quiet students who have valuable contributions may rarely speak up. Crowdsourcing, a popular technology-based technique for generating content, ideas, solutions, and other information through outsider participants, can be an effective method for encouraging active classroom participation from all students. This article reviews several educational uses of crowdsourcing and then details an anecdotal case study of one instructor's uses of in-class crowdsourcing, commenting on its potential for improving student engagement.

Keywords

crowdsourcing, participation, engagement, technology

The Crowdsourcing Classroom: Engagement in the Age of *Boaty McBoatface*

In 2016, the National Environment Research Council (NERC) designed a now-infamous online poll to name a new arctic research vessel. When, as name suggestions trickled in, BBC radio personality James Hand off-handedly suggested the name Boaty McBoatface, the competition more or less ended: internet users worldwide flocked to vote for this least-dignified possibility on the list. Although Boaty McBoatface was the definitive winner of the poll, NERC opted instead to christen the vessel *Sir David Attenborough*, relegating *Boaty McBoatface* to an unmanned submarine to be used in conjunction with the ship of a now-respectable name.

The *Boaty McBoatface* debacle was an effort in crowdsourcing, or allowing a group of "outsiders" to contribute ideas, solutions, content, or labor—often anonymously—to a project, almost exclusively via the internet. Originating and studied in business and marketing as a strategy to quickly and inexpensively develop materials and concepts through non-expert sources (Zao and Zhou, 2012; Brabham, 2009), crowdsourcing has begun to gain recognition as a legitimate and useful strategy in education, as well.

One popular use of crowdsourcing techniques in educational settings is in developing course content and materials. Cummings (2014) suggests using crowdsourced materials from the community at-large to develop "Teacher Created Prescriptive Interactive Content" (p. 32) for remedial social sciences students: community members volunteer their time and expertise to create content in conjunction with instructors. On a similar note, Henderson and Thai (2014) discuss development of an online platform for law casebooks—which they

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

have renamed coursebooks in order to better define the potential content—that would allow for crowdsourced reading, annotating, and authoring. Their system allows a law professor to select the materials for the coursebook and then annotate them for student consideration in addition to allowing lawyers and other legal professionals to contribute content and commentary. The platform further allows students to annotate, comment on others' annotations, and customize the content in ways that are useful and meaningful to them but also visible to others. Such a platform considers crowdsourcing at a number of levels, and users experience the crowdsourced materials in myriad ways, as well.

Other studies recommend allowing students to crowdsource study materials such as an interactive, customizable digital database of terminology flashcards for medical school students (Bow, Dattilo, Jonas, & Lehmann, 2013) or posting examples of persuasive content found on the internet to a collaborative undergraduate psychology course blog (Hills, 2015). In an effort to reduce cheating, Olson (2014) uses crowdsourced exam questions in management information systems courses. Olson notes that by allowing groups of students to generate high-quality multiple-choice questions for each unit of study and then distributing those questions to all students for a short period of time before each test, not only were students participating in a valuable study method, they were also prevented from a common method of cheating by accessing test banks. And in a quirky use of crowdsourcing for materials generation, Turcotte and Betrus (2016) have crowdsourced the content of cards for their teacher-education game, *Teaching Bad Apples*, which is modeled after popular games like *Apples to Apples* or *Cards Against Humanity* but intended to spark conversations about how to handle difficult teaching situations through counterexamples. Both the scenarios and the comical means by which players may suggest approaching those situations are almost entirely crowdsourced from other teachers.

Though popular, content and materials creation are not the only uses of crowdsourcing in education. Paulin and Haythornthwaite (2016) consider the power of crowdsourcing in various elements of online instruction through massive open online courses (MOOCs), noting that MOOCs often rely on crowdsourcing for numerous content materials like syllabi, but that the technique is also useful for discussion, evaluation, behavior management, and practices of student-participants. Johnston Turner (2013) uses a crowdsourcing technique to involve her students in critique and selection of musical ensemble performance pieces and found that in doing so, her students were considerably more engaged. Johnston Turner's is not the only study to mention an improvement in student engagement, and it is that point upon which my suggestions for crowdsourcing in the classroom lie.

Crowdsourcing the Classroom

While much of the published scholarship regarding educational crowdsourcing focuses on use of crowdsourcing completed outside of the physical classroom, this piece focuses on a small-scale use of crowdsourcing in individual classrooms using only contributions of students in that class. The methods I describe here are those I began implementing in my first-year composition (FYC) classrooms and later incorporated into a graduate course project; I continue to employ them in the teacher preparation courses I currently teach. I have not formally studied these practices: what I present here is a developing technique that has anecdotally worked very well for increasing student engagement and involvement and that I suggest holds promise for engaging reluctant and enthusiastic learners alike.

Perhaps some readers will believe it goes without saying, but tech access is a must in this practice: for undergraduate students on my campus, the two-course FYC sequence requires that students either have a laptop or that they take a section taught in a computer lab, so computer and internet access are an assumed provision in the courses. Crowdsourcing activities as I describe them rely on students having access to the internet in class.

Student Engagement

Classroom participation often revolves around a handful of students in the class answering or asking most of the questions (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Nowhere was this phenomenon clearer to me than in my early-morning Academic Writing section. Any time I asked questions or pushed for responses from students, I had willing respondents. Those willing respondents, however, were always the same two or three students. Every time. This is not particularly shocking. Sparks (2012) explains that

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

perhaps up to "half of Americans are introverts**"** and "Studies of college students have found that particularly in larger and unstructured groups, more-vocal members can dominate, even when they do not have the correct answer." I called on other students and put together groups to get more engagement, but I couldn't do all groupwork all the time. Although research indicates that calling on students who do not volunteer increases volunteered responses (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2013), I did not find an increase in responses to be true of this particular class. I wanted to do something that would make more widespread participation in class not only possible, but also comfortable and even fun.

That's when it struck me: shared documents online offered a perfect opportunity for students to safely and anonymously share thoughts, ideas, questions, feedback, and other forms of their work and thinking. The applications available in Google Drive were particularly attractive, specifically Slides and Docs. By contributing an editable document or set of slides I would then share with the class via a link, students could submit responses anonymously to activities that would generate a variety of information for class consumption and consideration.

At the time I started developing thoughts about how to implement such activities, the class was studying various logical fallacies. Students struggled to understand each fallacy and why it might be problematic or misleading. Before each class, students would read about two to four logical fallacies and then explain each fallacy clearly in their own words and provide an example in their blogs. Students also needed to find and post a contemporary media example of half of the assigned fallacies. In class, we would review the fallacies, share some of the examples they came up with, and talk through any confusion. But of course, only two or three people were doing all of the talking.

Small Group Crowdsourcing Technique

On the third day of our study of logical fallacies, after discussing the definitions of each of the fallacies students had read about for that day, I put students in groups of three or four, with each group looking closely at one of the fallacies. Then, the groups came up with an example of the fallacy in contemporary media and an explanation of why their choice of example was, in fact, an example of that fallacy. Instead of having students email me links to or copied-and-pasted text of examples as I had done in the past, I shared with them a link to a set of Google Slides I had labeled for small groups to complete (see Fig. 1).

Replace this text with an explanation of why your example is this logical fallacy.

Logical Fallacy Name Here

Replace this text with your contemporary example of a use of your logical fallacy.

Figure 1: Sample Google Slide with Instructions

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

Each group completed one slide together, and the initial activity only took perhaps fifteen minutes. Because we were working from a shared application, every group could see the examples and explanations of every other group, but they maintained a certain level of anonymity because no group knew which fallacy any other group had been assigned. The medium of Google Slides allowed students to share a wide variety of examples: videos, audio clips, memes, tweets, Facebook posts, excerpts from online news articles, and others. The group component made sharing their examples feel less vulnerable. During review, rather than making each group present their work, groups had time to review the other groups' slides, decide whether or not they thought the example worked, and comment in the "Speaker Notes" section. This allowed groups to comment without feeling like they were "calling out" their classmates, and it also generated strong questions for discussion (see Fig. 2). As we discussed each slide, sometimes a group would voluntarily explain their choice a little further. When necessary, we made some adjustments to the slides to clarify or correct them, but it was not necessary for any group to reveal that a slide was or was not theirs.

I continued to use the shared slides as we worked our way through learning about roughly a dozen more logical fallacies over the course of two weeks, and each time we finished one of the activities, I would adjust the link in Canvas from an editable set of slides to read-only. This kept students from making additional changes after we had completed the activity but allowed them access to all the slides throughout the course for reference. After we began using the crowdsourced slideshows, several students began posting examples of all the fallacies on their blogs rather than just posting the minimum requirement of half. Although I cannot say for certain, I believe they started doing this extra work to make sure they had an example for any fallacy they might be assigned in the group slides. The use of the slides worked so well in terms of encouraging everyone to participate that I started considering other ways to use shared documents in class.

Individual Contributions Technique with Undergrads

A few weeks later, when the class was beginning research project proposals, I considered an individual-participant form of crowdsourcing to develop a list of potential project topics. For their research, students would need to investigate a particular contemporary outlet, personality, or medium in order to analyze and problematize it. So, for example, students might choose to look at how two different media outlets covered the same story and notice how the people involved in the story are described differently in each account, leading to an argument about how an outlet's underlying message

Figure 2: Student-Generated Slide with Student Comments Below

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

affects how people involved in the event are characterized. Or a student might analyze the number-one songs on a particular music chart and notice certain elements of music or lyrics are consistently present or absent, thus developing an argument that successful songwriting in that genre must (or must not) include those elements. Coming up with topics like this, though, is challenging for relatively novice researchers, so I developed a Google Doc entitled, "Potential Areas of Media or Inquiry," that I shared with the class for brainstorming possible research avenues.

In preparation for developing this list, I first came up with a topic example so that students had an idea of where this project was headed. I opted to use *The Borowitz Report*—a satirical column by Andy Borowitz about current news events published in *The New Yorker*—as my example of a contemporary medium. I posted a link to *The Borowitz Report* archives on Canvas, and we explored several posts together. I explained that I enjoy political satire, so I might first start looking at satirical pieces as a potential avenue for research (since it would interest me) and then look for patterns or questions about the pieces I read. Students perused the archives, and we discussed categories into which *The Borowitz Report* potentially falls (political humor, political satire, current events, comedy, online snark, political spin) and questions that might arise in reading the pieces (Is Borowitz as critical of liberal politicians as he is of conservatives? Who is the readership of *The New Yorker*? Do readers ever think *The Borowitz Report* is real news?). Then, I told the students that we would be crowdsourcing a list of potential areas of inquiry and that students could contribute to the document any ideas they might have. The ideas could—and should—be broad and undeveloped, I explained. The point was to find something of interest to start investigating and then to analyze and question it in search of an argument.

I was not prepared for how well the crowdsourced list would work. Starting with a bullet list with "Satire in Print" as the initial entry, the students took it from there. As they generated ideas, I walked around our computer-lab classroom, happy to see almost every student typing contributions to the list. They developed two and a half single-spaced pages of potential topics, adding to my suggestion others like "Political Speeches," "Celebrity Tweets," "Social Advocacy Groups," "Cover-

age of Cryptocurrency," and "Lyrics to Songs." As the topics multiplied, students started developing subtopics beneath most of the broader topics. For example, under "Space Travel Coverage" were the following bullets:

- Old NASA reports

- Tragedy reporting

- Falcon Heavy launch

Two-thirds of the broad topics/media had at least one subtopic bulleted beneath them; there were an average of almost four subtopics connected to the topics that had them. The students had generated 87 unique topics and subtopics in roughly ten minutes, using one another's ideas as springboards to create a widely varied, interesting list.

Perhaps even more impressive than the sheer volume of crowdsourced ideas was the additional thinking students were doing within the document. One student wrote as a main topic, "Elon Musk." Since Elon Musk is a person rather than a medium, other students added questions to help develop the topic—"reporting by him? About him?"—as a means of encouraging the writer to think about how the topic would fulfill this assignment. In the "Lyrics to Songs" category, most of the nine subtopic bullet points were things like "protest music" or "feminism in music," but one student developed some questions: "what do they portray? How do they affect us?" Student thinking was clearly evident throughout the document, and like the previous Google Slides files, when the document was complete, I switched the link on Canvas from one in which the students could edit to a read-only document that students would have continued access to throughout the course.

Crowdsourcing the list allowed students to build on one another's ideas, make inquiries of the ideas, and, since student contributions were anonymous, participate without fear of embarrassment by public criticism. And when it came time to select a direction for research, few students chose the same topics. Although initially I had four students start researching Donald Trump's tweets, in the end, I only had two students who followed through with that topic. Three students analyzed advertising and four focused on music, but each student researched a dif-

Individual Contributions Technique with Grad Students

At this point in the semester, I was on a roll. "What else could I use crowdsourcing in the classroom for?" I thought. In an assignment for a graduate course I was taking in archival research, a colleague and I developed a teaching demonstration around crowdsourcing. One of the challenges of archival research is that you often don't know what you're looking for until you find it. Even researchers looking for something quite specific tend to leave the archives with more and different information and ideas than they anticipated. Thus, archival research is rather nebulous in nature, and it requires a lot of critical thinking and questioning throughout the process. My colleague and I decided to capitalize on the potential of crowdsourcing to develop varied avenues of inquiry in our teaching demo.

First, we selected an artifact for the class to investigate (see Fig. 3). The artifact is a digital image of the first page of a 1972 newspaper article about a former professor at Bowling Green State University (Wolfe), and we placed it on the first page of the shared document with the following instructions: "Review the artifact below. Consider what questions it raises as you read and examine it." In the demonstration itself, we shared the link to the editable document and told our participants that when they finished examining the artifact, they could move on to the second page of the document and follow the directions there. Those directions read, "ACTIVITY: Below, please write questions you have based on this archival document." The idea here was to generate a list of questions that might assist an archival researcher in developing a research direction. In fewer than ten minutes we had a very full page of questions (35 in all) that ranged from "Would we still call him 'eccentric' today?" to "How did he become interested in biology?" to "Why was this actually written? What was the purpose of the publication?" In addition, one participant prefaced her questions with a statement: "I feel like they are just saying 'look this weird bachelor left money for you' without actually telling us who he was. Was his family consulted at all in the writing of this piece? How might

they respond to this?" Participants also responded to one another: one student responded to a question about the professor's attire by noting that bow ties are better suited to work in a laboratory than neck ties since they are less likely to get caught in something.

After we called time on the first crowdsourcing activity, we discussed the questions as a group. Because the purpose of this assignment was to experiment with and learn about teaching techniques using archives rather than necessarily generating archival knowledge, the discussion focused on why this activity might be useful in teaching archival research. We agreed that archival researchers benefit from getting input from others and that the variety of questions generated would help novice archival researchers see the many possibilities in the examination of just a single artifact. Then we turned our attention to an additional crowdsourcing activity using two questions adapted from an online worksheet created by National Archives (Analyzing, 2017), and participants again answered those questions directly into the Google Doc, building on both the questions from the previous activity and one another's responses in this activity.
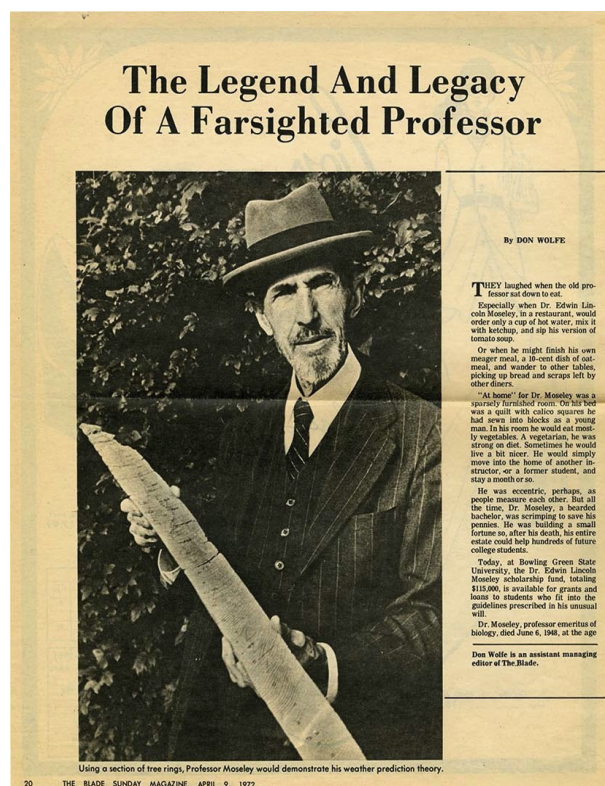

Figure 3: Artifact Digitally Reproduced for Archival Research Activity

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

The first question, "What did (or could) you find out from this document that you might not learn anywhere else?" generated seven responses (some of which were only marginally responsive to the question), but the other question, "What other documents or historical evidence would you need to use to help you understand this event or topic?" garnered twelve varied responses that demonstrated the benefit of crowdsourcing. One commenter suggested going to the probate court to get a copy of the will, another commented that "eccentric" was coded language use which over time might be more or less shrouded in connotation, and another asked if biologists still use the method of examining tree rings to predict weather. Each of these responses demonstrates a different focus in examination of the artifact, and different foci are a result of the various commenters' backgrounds and experiences. Again, as a class, we discussed the benefits of allowing students to contribute in such a way. The consensus was that the crowdsourcing activity was fun and engaging, and that it allowed participants to not only contribute easily, but also to think differently about the topic as they read others' responses. By synchronously working in a "live" document, the questions and ideas multiplied because of the ability to build on content as it was added.

Lessons Learned

Crowdsourcing in the classroom using shared documents can be a powerful tool in encouraging participation and critical thinking, but it has to be planned and executed with a degree of care to be truly effective. After several successes with the method, I attempted a quickly developed crowdsourcing activity around APA documentation, and the results were abysmal. The activity itself was not well conceived, the students were underprepared and submitted inaccurate and awkward responses, and I spent a lot of time reinstructing afterwards. While crowdsourcing lends itself well to idea-generation and think-tank-style activities, it is more complicated to use in activities that require execution of complex skills, which was part of the issue with my APA activity. That's not to say it *can't* be used for complex skills, only to say that in doing so, considerable preparation is necessary. In thinking through my own successes and failure with crowdsourcing activities in the classroom, there are a few questions instructors should consider:

1. **Is the end goal of the activity something that would benefit from many perspectives?** In other words, are you hoping that students can build from one another's contributions in ways that would be unlikely if students were working alone or even in small groups? In both the topic-generating activity with my Academic Writing students and the teaching demo in the archival research course, the activity centered around developing as many questions, directions, and ideas as possible, and the ability of students to see one another's input in real time allowed for even greater depth of thought and more creative suggestions.

2. **Are the students prepared to do the task the crowdsourcing activity asks of them?** It was clear in my APA citation exercise that—among other things—lack of student preparation negatively influenced the success of the activity. On the flip side, in developing the collaborative slides about logical fallacies, students had already completed considerable work to prepare them for the activity. And, in creating a list of potential research topics, I walked the class through a potential topic and a discussion of several directions such a topic might take prior to asking them to start suggesting topics of their own. Students in the more effective crowdsourcing activities had the information and skills necessary to contribute successfully.

3. **How will we use the materials the students generate?** This means considering a whole host of additional questions: How will the document be used in class discussion? In what ways will students be able to respond to one another's ideas within the document? What will the finished document allow students to do that they may not have been able to do without it? Will the students need access to whatever document they collaboratively create, and if so, what is the best method of delivering that product to them?

4. **Are there technology barriers to overcome?** The class in which I began experimenting with crowdsourcing was held in a computer lab. Students were guaranteed access to a computer during class. But in my laptop sections, although

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

students are technically required to have a laptop and bring it to class every day, the requirement did not guarantee that every student would have a computer every day. Google Docs can be very frustrating on mobile devices, and if a student comes to class without the required technology, he or she is relegated to sharing a device or not participating at all. Further, even applications like those in Google Drive require a certain level of prowess with technology that we might assume all students come to our courses in possession of. It is useful to consider a very low-stakes activity with the applications you intend to use for crowdsourcing in order to ensure that all the students have the requisite skills to participate. Finally, if students don't have access to computers or the internet in class, crowdsourcing is still possible with low-tech means such as big poster paper and post-it notes. Although it doesn't necessarily facilitate the same immediate and reciprocal responses the online method promotes, similar results are possible.

But What About Boaty?

A looming question remains: What do you do when students produce a Boaty McBoatface? Does the process break down if the suggestions go from thoughtful and reasonable to silly or distracting?

Throughout the semester, my FYC students did not produce any Boaty McBoatface responses. I was fully anticipating some flippancy because prior to teaching university students, I spent a decade teaching in high schools, the bastion of the Boaty McBoatface-style response. So although my own students did not produce problematic responses, I had considered the contingency of such contributions carefully and have two thoughts about handling Boaties.

First, it is important to keep an open mind about certain contributions. Sometimes what seems inappropriate or flippant is an attempt at genuine contribution. My colleague from the archival class tried out some crowdsourcing in her own classroom, and under the question "What makes an introduction bad?" one student entered "Satan" and another wrote "White contacts." When the class discussed these entries, the students who contributed them spoke up and explained that in a previous

activity that compared movie trailers to introductory paragraphs, one trailer featured a random image of a devil character with strange white contact lenses—elements that had not fit with the rest of the trailer and were thus a distraction. The crowdsourced list did not include "distracting elements," so although neither "Satan" nor "white contacts" was clearly connected to the question, through conversation, it was clear that both students were critically thinking even if not effectively communicating that thinking. Keeping an open mind and not dismissing seemingly disconnected contributions without discussing them can lead to worthwhile ideas that may not initially be presented clearly.

If a student adds content that is purposely off topic, though, it is important to deal with the issue immediately so that students do not get into the habit of using crowdsourcing activities as grounds for distraction rather than engagement. In schools where students all have Google accounts, tracking who makes what contribution in the Google Drive applications is relatively easy (names pop up with cursors), and it is possible to use the revision history of the document to see who wrote what. Knowing that Google Drive is equipped with a revision history feature often prevents intentionally distracting comments to begin with. At my university, though, the students were mostly anonymous in Google Drive, so tracking inappropriate comments would have been more complicated and might have required that I modify the activities to prevent them from becoming a distraction.

Food for Thought

Crowdsourcing activities can be an excellent addition to classroom practices that encourage engagement and whole-class participation. Perhaps particularly in classes where only a few students regularly participate, crowdsourcing can provide a safe way for even introverted or uncertain students to contribute meaningfully to class activities. I have found it useful in generating many ideas in a short period of time and in providing a safe space for sharing examples and explanations of course concepts for whole-class consumption. While there are some hurdles to overcome in implementing crowdsourcing activities in class, the benefits of doing so are significant.

It is also possible that crowdsourcing activities may foster enough confidence in some students that they begin contributing to class in other activities. I found

The Crowdsourcing Classroom *continued*

that by the second or third small-group crowdsourcing activity, a few students who had never spoken up in class before were now verbally defending and questioning examples and explanations. Of course, some of this may be increased confidence from having had the opportunity to discuss the ideas with a small group first, or it may have been because students were becoming more comfortable with the class as a whole, but a study of potential increased discussion participation in classes or conversations that follow crowdsourcing activities would be another interesting avenue of investigation.

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TEACHING REPORTS

Crowdfunding in the Classroom
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Abstract

This article presents the results of an innovative project conducted in a first-year seminar: a crowdfunding campaign designed to help students learn about philanthropy, practice important skills, and build relationships on campus. Using feedback from a pre- and post-test and a final class paper, the article shows how the assignment was effective: students were very engaged in the course and they practiced fundraising, web design, communication, and collaborative skills. They experienced how difficult it is to raise, and ask for, money. They witnessed the incremental value of relatively small donations and reflected on the "identifiable victim effect." Students also reported increased knowledge about campus hunger. Finally, and although the project did not have a significant impact on students' feeling of belonging on campus in general, it helped them create meaningful connections within the classroom.

Keywords

crowdfunding, experiential education, first-year seminar

Crowdfunding in the Classroom

Crowdfunding has become ubiquitous in both our professional and personal lives. What can it teach our students? A crowdfunding project was implemented in a fall 2017 first-year seminar on Global Poverty and Charitable Giving at Salem State University (SSU) in an effort to assess whether a well-crafted crowdfunding campaign run by students would help them learn about philanthropy, practice important skills, and build relationships on campus by working collaboratively with other students and offices. Over a 14-week period, students designed and managed a crowdfunding campaign to benefit the university food pantry. Working in teams, they practiced skills in fundraising, web design, communication, and collaboration and worked closely with several campus offices such as Student Advocacy, Institutional Advancement, and the First Year Office.

The crowdfunding assignment was the first ever implemented at SSU, a public institution where 35% of students identify as first-generation college students. With an enrollment of about 9,000, Salem State is one of the largest state universities in Massachusetts. The assignment was also among the first of its kind nationally; though schools and classrooms are increasingly relying on crowdfunding to raise funds for discrete classroom projects like internships or field trips, very few courses use it as the basis of a graded assignment. Additionally, there are only a handful of empirical studies measuring the pedagogical value of crowdfunding.

According to Best and Neiss (2015), crowdfunding can be defined as "the pooling of financial resources of many individuals to convert an idea into a project or business (p. 3)." It is increasingly used beyond private entrepreneurship to include community-based, civic endeavors

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(Vealey & Gerding, 2016). Such civic crowdfunding (raising money for a public project) is gaining popularity among local governments, nonprofits, and community organizations (Lindsay, 2015). Likewise, many scientists and universities are resorting to crowdfunding to secure critical funding at a time of shrinking public support (Gray, 2015). At SSU specifically, 26 crowdfunding campaigns had been completed by October 2018 (only seven of which reached their financial goal) to benefit students' scholarships, events, conferences, study abroad experiences, and field trips. One campaign raised over $80,000 to fund an endowed scholarship.[1]

Crowdfunding became popular thanks to the non-profit organization Kiva and its micro-lending site (Best & Neiss, 2015); it then grew with the creation of IndieGoGo and Kickstarter in 2007 and 2008 (Davies, 2014), while the actual term was coined in 2006 (Gerber, Hui & Kuo, 2012). As an industry, it has benefitted enormously from the growth of social networks. Data show that more than two-thirds of individuals who visit crowdfunding sites do so through a social media referral (Davies, 2014). Studies also suggest that campaigns that have a strong presence on social media (for example if they collect many "likes" on Facebook) are much more likely to be successful (Moisseyev, 2013). Most crowdfunding campaigns are small-scale: three-fourths of Kickstarter campaigns raise under $1,000 (Hogue, 2015).

Literature Review

Though there is a growing literature exploring crowdfunding in the business world, there is much less that considers crowdfunding as a civic oriented practice, and just a handful of studies that have looked at crowdfunding pedagogically. Not only is the field relatively new, scholars have studied crowdfunding primarily from the disciplines of management, entrepreneurship, finance, and technology (Gerber et al., 2012). Additionally, few university classroom projects incorporate crowdfunding as part of the course material and the basis of a graded assignment (Vealey & Gerding, 2016); one notable exception is a 2016 course at Suffolk University's Sawyer Business School (BizEd, 2017).[2] In fact, studies show that students are not familiar with the actual term, though they usually have heard of Kickstarter and may have shared pages on social media (Vealey & Gerding, 2016).

Crowdfunding in the classroom is a type of experiential education, a high-impact educational practice valued for its pedagogical outcomes. A vast literature has been devoted to assess these outcomes (Jacoby & Howard, 2014) not only for students (including their academic success and personal growth) but also for faculty, universities, community partners, and even society in general (Giles & Eyler, 1998). Experiential education's attractiveness lies in its ability to address a shortcoming of traditional teaching by allowing students "to bridge classroom study and life in the world and to transform inert knowledge into knowledge-in-use" (Eyler, 2009, p. 24).

In comparison to typical experiential education practices (such as internships or service-learning), crowdfunding assignments are less logistically demanding, given that the hands-on learning components take place on campus. In contrast, many experiential projects entail spending time in the community (Campbell, 2014). Crowdfunding also eschews potential drawbacks of on-site service-learning projects for community partners, such as working with students who lack professionalism, are not sufficiently prepared, or are not respecting confidentiality agreements (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Tyron, Stoecker, Martin, Hilgendorf & Nellis, 2009). Still, crowdfunding in particular, and fundraising in general, are time-consuming activities. Aguiniga and Bowers (2018) integrated fund-raising in a social work course as part of a service-learning project; students helped community organizations through community forums, fund-raising, and advocacy. The authors note that fund-raising (in this case not crowdfunding but a rummage sale and a silent auction) was the most time-consuming aspect of the assignment.

Using crowdfunding as a classroom pedagogy can bring many rewards to students, even if the campaign is not financially successful; in fact, most crowdfunding

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[1] All campaigns, including past projects, are available here: https://crowdfunding.salemstate.edu/
[2] Information about the course, Crowdfunding the Startup: ENT 340, can be found here: http://www.suffolk.edu/business/undergraduate/67917.php

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campaigns do not reach their financial goal (Hogue, 2015, Kerrigan, 2014, Phelps & Smythe, 2015). As mentioned above, a rapidly growing number of organizations, both public and private, are raising funds through crowdfunding. Thus, by running a campaign, students are practicing skills that are valued in today's job market (Phelps & Smythe, 2015), including entrepreneurship, marketing, and web design (Mikhaylova, 2016) and aptitudes such as flexibility and resiliency (Phelps & Smythe, 2015). Instructors using fundraising as a classroom activity have noted similar benefits. Patterson (2014) found that a service-learning project in a first-year engineering course (which involved drafting fundraising proposals and presentations for local nonprofit organizations) had a positive effect on student engagement. In Shaw's class (2007), student worked in sales teams to award funding to non-profit agencies; the project increased students' interest in the course content, helped them develop critical skills and academic competencies and build relationships with other students.

Collaboration in particular is a fundamental component of a crowdfunding classroom assignment. Students in Vealey and Gerding's class noted the "intense amount of collaborative work involved in the research and development of a compelling civic crowdfunding campaign" (2016, p. 420). Crowdfunding can help students build friendships and relationships on campus–something that is highly correlated with retention and graduation (Gluch, 2016). To secure funding, students need to identify individuals who are eager to support their cause, including university alumni (BizEd, 2015). Funders of crowdfunding campaigns are part of a community of common interest (Gerber & Hui, 2012). Given that one of the first-year seminar's goals was to promote a sense of community, this aspect of crowdfunding was particularly attractive.

Crowdfunding and the First Year Seminar

The first-year seminar at SSU was an ideal course to experiment with a crowdfunding assignment for four reasons. First, at SSU, the first-year seminar is not taught with a focus on content; rather a key objective is to assist students in their transition to college. Since implementing a crowdfunding assignment requires to set aside many class periods to complete the project, a course with a flexible content is particularly appropriate.

At SSU, "First-year seminars serve as launching pads for exploration and discovery, providing students with an opportunity to look at the world and specific issues and topics in a whole new way" (Salem State University). The course is required for all incoming freshmen and students self-select into sections of their choice. In fall 2017 for example, over 50 sections were offered, with topics ranging from "Vets Among Us" to "Whale Watching in New England."

Additionally, many freshmen experience courses seek to create a sense of community among students. At SSU, one of the first-year seminar's goals is to help students learn about campus offices and services available to them. Because it extends students the opportunity to work closely with classmates and community partners, and to use services on campus to successfully complete the project, crowdfunding can contribute decisively to this goal.

Next, a service-learning assignment can increase students' motivation in a mandatory course. As argued by Eyler (2009), "Students' commitment and curiosity are fueled when they take responsibility for action with consequences for other people, and this, in turn, leads to increased effort and attention (p. 27)." Besides, because they have just arrived on campus, freshmen may be particularly amenable to the experience.

Lastly, my first-year seminar was a particularly good fit for a crowdfunding campaign considering the course's focus on poverty and philanthropy. Its syllabus outlined four course goals. The first was to prompt students to examine innovative approaches to combat poverty and the challenges and rewards of philanthropy. The course also aimed to engage students in experiential learning. Thirdly, it endeavored to promote a sense of community among students and finally, to assist them in their transition to college life. Derived from these broad goals, the course had five learning objectives, posing that, after completing the course, students would have:

1. Analyzed, discussed, and debated, innovative approaches to combat poverty;

2. Discussed the moral imperative to act to help alleviate poverty at home and abroad;

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3. Actively engaged in philanthropy by designing and managing a crowdfunding campaign with proceeds to benefit the university food pantry;

4. Practiced skills such as fundraising, web design, marketing, communication, and team building;

5. Worked closely with others on campus, including university offices such as Student Advocacy, Groups and Clubs, Marketing, and the First Year Office.

The crowdfunding assignment itself (more is said below about its implementation) was designed to meet the last three of these learning objectives. The hypothesis was that by designing and running the campaign, students would learn about fundraising and philanthropy (learning objective three), practice important skills (objective four), and build relationships on campus, within and beyond the classroom (objective five).

Methodology

To measure the effectiveness of the assignment, a mixed method was utilized. First, a pre-test was administered on the first day of class and a post-test during the last week of the semester. Questions are included in appendix and focused on the learning objectives stated above. All students (19) took the pre-test but one student was missing when the post-test was administered.

The pre and post-test contained nine identical close-ended questions paired with a five-point Likert scale (e.g.: "I feel like I belong to a community of learners on campus"). The pre-test had one additional close-ended question ("I have participated in community projects before") and the post-test two additional ones ("I have learned useful skills by completing the service-learning project" and "I would have learned more from this course if the time spent on crowdfunding had been spent on learning material"). Both tests also featured open-ended questions aimed at capturing students' past experiences with crowdfunding, philanthropy, and community service (e.g.: Have you ever donated money to a cause online, for example through Kickstarter?") and to gauge how the project helped them reach the course learning objectives stated above (e.g.: "Has the project changed your opinion toward philanthropy & giving?").

Additionally, a simple content analysis of the course final paper was completed. In this last assignment, students were asked to answer seven questions to reflect on the project as a whole, including lessons learned, group and individual contributions, challenges encountered, where we succeeded and failed, and how the project illustrated the course's key concepts. There was intentional overlap between the pre- and post-test and the final paper questions as the paper offered an opportunity for more in-depth feedback. A copy of the final paper's questions is included in appendix A.

Implementation

The crowdfunding assignment was a semester-long project but only five class periods at the beginning of the semester were entirely devoted to it. During the rest of the semester, the campaign was discussed, the page and social media feeds were updated, and potential donors were contacted for about 20 minutes weekly. Students were graded for the project primarily through a final reflective paper and through peer-reviews completed by other students in their groups.

The crowdfunding campaign was run on the university-supported platform (https://crowdfunding.salemstate.edu/), which avoided fees and complicated transactions. During the second week of the semester, students read about crowdfunding, including best practices. Students deliberated over the fundraising target and agreed that $500 was a reasonable amount. In mid-September a staff member from the university office of Institutional Advancement conducted a workshop on effective crowdfunding and guided us through the creation of a university-supported platform; she provided support and advice on the campaign through the entire semester, especially around the time of the launch. In September, the director of the office of Student Advocacy, who managed the food pantry, was invited to speak to the class; she described the history of the pantry, whom it serves, how it functions, and shared information about campus hunger and homelessness. Students contacted her on several occasions during the semester to obtain information regarding student hunger. Students also worked closely with the First-Year Seminar office; they helped with the Twitter campaign, printing color copies of the posters, and other logistical tasks.

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In late September, students began working on the crowdfunding and Facebook pages. They determined the donation levels, wrote a project description and slogan, created a video for the site, posted short biographies, and launched a Twitter feed. They took pictures of the Food Pantry for the Facebook site and drafted emails to send out to potential donors. Finally, a class photo was posted on the project page.

The page launched on October 19 and–as is often the case with crowdfunding–most donations (16) were given during the first week of the campaign. Most came from campus staff and faculty who learned about the fundraiser through university mailing lists. After the launch, students worked on the campaign in class on average 20 minutes each week to reach out to potential donors: they posted regular updates on the site and Facebook page, hung flyers around campus, and twitted about the campaign. At the end, the campaign raised $865 from 27 donors–173% of the initial goal. Six students contributed but they were all from our course. Only five donors appeared to be unaffiliated with the university.

At the end of the semester, the director of Student Advocacy was invited back to the class so she could explain how funds raised would be utilized. Students shared their overall experience with the campaign and their hopes for the funds.

Findings

Prior Experience with Service-Learning and Crowdfunding

The pre-test revealed that most students in the course had prior experience with service-learning, an interest in community service and caritative giving, but little exposure to crowdfunding specifically. For example, the vast majority of students agreed that "problems are more easily solved when people work together," that "giving to others is a rewarding experience," and that we all "have a responsibility to help others." They had almost all participated in community projects in the past such as volunteering or raising money for a cause. Further, more than half had had such community experiences in a classroom setting, for example by serving meals to the homeless, collecting donations for a food pantry, or raising money for a hospital wing. They acknowledged the value of such experiential learning: 18 (out of 19) agreed or strongly

agreed that "practical applications help students learn course content more deeply" and 17 agreed or strongly agreed that "more college courses should include experiential learning."

On the other hand, prior to the course, most students (13) had never heard the term "crowdfunding"–confirming the literature on the topic (Vealey & Gerding, 2016). Additionally, more than half of the students (11) had never contributed money to an online fundraiser.

Understanding Philanthropy

Both the post-test and the final papers suggested that students learned important lessons about philanthropy and fundraising (learning objective three) by completing the assignment.

In the post-test, over two-third of students said that the project had changed their opinion toward philanthropy and giving ("Has the project changed your opinion toward philanthropy & giving? Explain either way"). The vast majority (16) did not believe that they would have "learned more from the course if the time spent on the crowdfunding campaign had been devoted to learning material instead." Students argued that it made philanthropy "more concrete," and "something doable."

In their final papers, many students also noted how much work is required to set up a successful campaign, and how difficult it is to raise money in general, as illustrated by the following five quotes (students' quotes were occasionally lightly edited for readability):

> I believe crowdfunding is a good way to raise money for a cause […]. However, it does require a lot of time and money to make a successful project. You need to be completely invested in making your page attractive and constantly updating it, posting news on social media in order to keep it alive.

> Another thing that I learned was the serious work that goes into raising money for any given charity or cause.

> I always thought that raising money would be easy but we learned that it takes a lot of effort and that you have to want to raise it.

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The project helped me understand that people do not like donating and convincing them to donate is hard.

You have to keep posting and reminding people to donate. […] Promoting and making donating a top priority […] is the hardest part.

A benefit of a crowdfunding campaign is seeing how individual donations that are trickling in can rapidly add up to a significant amount. Many students mentioned this in their final paper and commented more generally on the incremental value of philanthropy. In the words of two of them:

Generosity and giving are much harder than they are portrayed to be, however, giving a small donation such as a dollar can have a bigger impact than one might think. Small donations are where most of our total money came from.

A modest sum, or even an action, can make a difference. You may not be able to solve the problem globally but you may change the life of an individual and inspire others to help you solve the issue.

Further, in their final papers, several students commented on one of our course lessons: people are more likely to donate to a campaign that highlights an individual story over general statistics. This "identifiable victim effect" was described in detail by the course's main reading, *A Path Appears* (Kristof & WuDunn, 2014, p. 189). Two students explained:

The fact is, people like to donate when they experience a one-on-one connection to someone, whereas knowing a specific issue displaces millions of people makes them feel like the problem is too large to make a difference, faceless enough to ignore.

Should we have emphasized one student's story and their struggles rather than speaking for an entire population on campus? Would this have made a notable difference in our results?

An additional benefit of the assignment according to students was learning about poverty: nationally, on college campuses, and at SSU in particular. "I never knew how many college kids go hungry and suffer in silence," one student wrote. Another remarked: "It gave me more insight and knowledge on poverty and which charities I should donate to." "More students than I thought are hungry on campus" a third simply noted.

Practicing Skills

The post-test showed that most students (13 out of 18) agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned useful skills by running the campaign (learning objective four). One of the post-test open-ended question further asked students to specifically list them ("**What specific skills do you think you might have learned by completing this project?**"). None were suggested in the question but students were encouraged to list several. Understandably, the two most commonly listed sets of kills were "creating & running a crowdfunding page/campaign," and "reaching out to potential donors/getting people to donate." Each category was mentioned by seven students. Another frequently mentioned set of skills was "helping those in needs/giving back." Many others were listed as well including communication ("communicating with the outside world and with my peers," "how to convey a message") marketing, time-management, working collaboratively (about which more is said below), brainstorming, writing, financial skills, and knowledge about poverty and philanthropy. Two students explained:

Our job was to reach out to different organizations or places near us to help raise money for our crowdfunding project. We worked with the "writing group" to help come up with an email to send out to the whole school and the different organizations. We also were the ones to communicate through the pages on Facebook and Twitter.

I was in a marketing group and we were responsible for making the video and flier for the project. Making the video was challenging because we had to gather information on college hunger. It was easier to find the overall national figures, but getting the actual Salem State University data was challenging because, as we discussed during our class, people are embarrassed to disclose the fact that they use the food pantry.

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Working with Others and Creating Connections on Campus

Did the project help students work collaboratively and make meaningful connections on campus (learning objective five)? Results from the post-test and the papers suggested that it was definitely the case within our own classroom but that it did not necessarily extend beyond.

For example, when asked on the post-test (open-ended questions) what they liked most about the assignment, almost all the students mentioned collaboration in some shape or form. "I felt like a leader," a student wrote, "I was part of something important." Working together was in fact the second most-cited positive aspect of the project after "helping others"–it was mentioned by more than half of the students. Examples of statements include: "We got an opportunity to get together and help other students in need," "I like how everyone worked so hard to put in a lot of efforts into the project," or "I like how everyone worked as a team."

Many students expressed similar thoughts about collaboration in their final paper, suggesting a strong feeling of connectedness within the classroom–as illustrated by the following quotes:

> The positive aspect about this is that we worked together as a class. […] This also means that our celebration for surpassing our goal felt even better. […] The pride we shared when we not only reached our goal but passed it by a couple hundred dollars is something I will never forget. Most importantly, as someone who utilizes the food pantry, I cannot wait to see what is added.

> I felt like I was part of a professional team.

> These factors created an amazing team experience that will further encourage me to help others in my future.

> Being able to work as a group with specific tasks was an important bonding experience that really brought this project together.

> I think crowdfunding is a great way to raise money for a cause. For me, one of the major pluses is that

it brings people together. It was exciting seeing who had posted, recognizing people's names, and encouraging people to give more. […] I think it is also a good thing that crowdfunding is on social media so heavily. Hearing a cause is important from a friend or neighbor and then learning about it and giving to it yourself is hugely impactful. It creates a ripple effect of giving and learning about organizations.

On the other hand, this sense of connectedness did not extend beyond the classroom. Asked in the post-test whether they felt "more connected to others on campus" students were mixed in their answers. Ten felt, in fact, more connected to others: "I feel like I connected more on campus. I joined many clubs […] and am planning to get more involved" one student explained. Another concurred: "I feel more connected on campus from being involved in a project that was aimed to help students on campus." According to a third "I have gained relationships with peers while learning about the school." However, eight students argued they did not necessarily feel more connected. One student noted: "I feel the same as I did in the beginning of the semester. Although I know more about the resources SSU has to offer."

There was even a slight decline (from 13 to 11 though one fewer student completed the post-test), between the pre and post-test in the number of students who agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition "I feel like I belong to a community of learners on campus."

Lastly, although the assignment was designed to make students work with several campus offices, there was only a slight improvement in the number of students agreeing that they knew where to go if they had a problem on campus: on the pre-test, only one strongly agreed and eleven agreed. On the post-test, five strongly agreed and seven agreed.

Shortcomings of the Campaign

Students discussed shortcomings of our campaign in both the pre- and post-test and the final paper. These comments provided useful information to improve the project in the future.

Regarding the fundraiser specifically, one limitation

Crowdfunding in the Classroom *continued*

was the relatively small number of donors (27). Since most gifts were not anonymous, we also know that a vast majority (80%) were made by university faculty and staff while we failed to attract donations from students and individuals beyond the university. Many students mentioned this in their papers, for example:

> I think that we were most successful in the beginning of the project. […] I also think that the outreach to community was good in the beginning, but then […] we began to fail. I don't think that we worked hard enough to continue outreach so that we would continue to get donations. Possibly tabling at lunch or sending out more emails would have helped.

> As a class, I think we were most successful in the days leading up to the launch date. We created a Facebook page, a Twitter, the crowdfunding page, pictures, a video and so much more. […] After the launch, we posted on social media telling people to donate, but after the first week, we did not keep up with asking people to donate. After we reached about $700, the donations slowed down. I think we could have improved by reaching out to our families more or even donating more ourselves if possible. Reaching out to more businesses that were actually willing to donate to our fundraiser would have also helped immensely.

Similarly, several students noted that our social media campaign was too anemic. One of them explained:

> Another area where we failed was the social media pages. I felt that a lot of people skimmed over the posts about our fundraiser since I didn't see a lot of "likes" or "shares." As a result, not a lot of people knew about the fundraiser and there was not enough awareness which caused us to lose potential donors.

Issues related to the project implementation were also brought up in the artifacts, such as overlaps between groups' roles, uneven work distribution, and not having enough time to complete tasks. Students also suggested strategies to improve a future campaign, such as "tabling at the cafeteria," doing more personal advertising, or running a more targeted campaign.

Conclusion

The crowdfunding assignment, the first of its kind at SSU, was an enjoyable, stimulating project for the first-year seminar. By completing it, students learned many key lessons about philanthropy and fundraising, even in areas where the campaign was not successful. For example, students experienced how difficult it is to raise, and ask for, money. They witnessed, as the campaign was unfolding, the incremental value of relatively small donations. They practiced important skills such as fundraising and web design. They realized that a successful social media campaign requires a lot of work. This confirms findings from the literature that a crowdfunding assignment allows students to practice skills that are increasingly in demand in today's job market (Phelps & Smythe, 2015; Mikhaylova, 2016). Lastly, the assignment helped build a strong sense of community within the classroom, illustrating Vealey & Gerding's (2016) observation that planning and running a civic crowdfunding campaign requires extensive collaborative work.

This study has several limitations. The content analysis of the pre and post-test and final paper was conducted by the instructor of the course, with a risk of involuntarily introducing bias in interpreting the results. The sample size was very limited with only 19 students in the class. Crucially, the project only partially achieved one of the stated learning objectives of the course: building relationships on campus. On this last point, it is important to note that students' feeling of connectedness on campus will be influenced by many factors beyond one specific course and project. Nevertheless, this suggests that the assignment could be designed to more strongly encourage students to work with other parts of campus. For example, reaching out to alumni to ask for their support might help students create useful connections beyond the classroom, in addition to potentially raising more funds.

Students' feedback pointed out at several ways in which the assignment can be improved in the future. The social media campaign should be more persuasive. Groups' roles should be revised to avoid overlap and duplication. More Salem State students might contribute if face-to-face encounters were organized, for example by tabling at the cafeteria. Finally, and though it should be done sensitively and ethically, the donation site could

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feature individual stories of students in need to personalize the campaign and appeal to a larger number of potential donors.

A crowdfunding assignment is relatively easy to implement and can be utilized to teach essential skills to students across many disciplines. It is particularly well-suited for courses on grant-writing, nonprofit management, and philanthropy but, as a unit, can find its place in a wide-range of courses seeking to develop skills such as web-design, fundraising, collaboration, and communication. Considering how ubiquitous fundraising has become in both our private and professional lives, it is vital to teach students how it works. Raising money for a philanthropic cause is also inspiring to students. As an instructor, I do not recall another assignment that created as much excitement in the classroom. It is clear that the campaign gave students agency and the feeling that they made a difference in the lives of fellow students. One student wrote in the final paper: "I like that the time we spent on the project made a difference in someone's life."

As mentioned above, civic crowdfunding is becoming standard practice in many professional fields, from science and technology to policy making and marketing. As such, a crowdfunding assignment can be tailored to meet the learning objectives of a wide range of courses. That said, and although it was beyond the scope of this first-year seminar, instructors seeking to integrate crowdfunding in an upper-level social science course should make sure that students will have the opportunity to critically reflect on its drawbacks. Civic crowdfunding has been lauded for its ability to increase citizens' engagement within their community (Stiver, Barroca, Minocha, Richards, & Roberts, 2015) specifically those traditionally disengaged from politics (Mayer, 2018). Critics claim however, that it might disproportionally benefit wealthy neighborhoods (Zuckerman, 2012), increase social inequality, and even weaken public institutions (Davies, 2015). Exploring these arguments would introduce students to fundamental policy questions such as the value of public goods, the dynamic of citizens' engagement, and the purpose of fundraising.

Crowdfunding in the Classroom *continued*

Appendix

Pre- and post-test questions (close-ended)

1. I feel connected to others on campus

2. Problems are more easily solved when people work together

3. I have a responsibility to help others in need

4. I know where to go on campus if I have any problems

5. Giving to/helping others is a rewarding experience

6. Practical applications help students learn course content more deeply

7. More college courses should include experiential learning projects

8. I feel like I belong to a community of learners on campus

9. I believe I can make a difference in the world

10. I have participated in community projects before (for example: volunteering, organizing or participating in a fundraiser etc…..) (pre-test only)

11. I have learned useful skills by completing the service-learning project, such as marketing, communication and web design (post-test only)

12. I would have learned more from this course if the time spent on crowdfunding had been spent on learning material (post-test only)

Pre-test open-ended questions

1. Have you ever heard the term "crowdfunding"? If so, explain in what context

2. Have you ever donated money to a cause online, for example through Kickstarter?

3. Have you ever participated in a classroom project that sought to help others in need, for example through volunteering, fundraising, campaigning etc.? If so, explain

4. What do you expect to learn in this class?

Post-test open-ended questions

1. If a friend asked you what you liked and disliked about the crowdfunding project and how it was implemented, what would you say? (be specific and list at least 2 items for each)

2. According to you, what are the pluses and minuses of hands-on learning projects ("learning by doing") in general?

3. What specific skills do you think you might have learned by completing this project? (list several if possible)

4. Has the project changed your opinion toward philanthropy & giving? Explain either way

5. One of the goals of the First-Year seminar is to help students "become members of a community of learners." Do you think that we achieved that goal –in other words, do you feel more connected on campus?

6. Do you feel like you know where to go if you have an issue on campus?

Final paper

Write a 4-page paper answering the questions below.

1. What are three important lessons you have learned by completing the crowdfunding project? (write about a page and refer to course reading/lessons)

2. What did your *group* contribute to the project and what challenges did it face?

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3. What specific contributions did you ***personally*** bring to the project?

4. Overall, what do you think we were most successful with? Where did we fail?

5. How did the project help you understand some of the course's key concepts? Cite specific course material

6. Overall, what do you think about the pluses and minuses of crowdfunding as a way to raise money for a cause?

7. In conclusion, and thinking beyond the crowdfunding assignment:

   • What do you think you will remember from this course one year from now?

   • What do you wish we had done that we didn't?

   • What were your favorite readings or videos?

   • If a friend asked you what you liked and what you disliked about this specific course, what would you say?

Crowdfunding in the Classroom *continued*

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TEACHING REPORTS

Educational Instruction for Group Work with Diverse Members: Innovative Student Classroom Engagement using a Game-Based Learning Activity
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Abstract

This exploratory research examines the impact of a classroom activity to support game-based engaging instruction of students learning about groups with diverse members. The adaptation of a common card game activity, which engages students in a group with diverse members, is implemented and explored for effectiveness. Suggestions to enhance student learning activities to promote facilitation of groups with diverse members are discussed for various disciplines. Potential implications are discussed regarding the societal movement toward groups with diverse members.

Keywords

diverse group members, game-based learning, engaged learning

Educational Instruction for Group Work with Diverse Members: Innovative Student Classroom Engagement using a Game-Based Learning Activity

As educators, providing opportunities for students to better understand course content is a common goal that all instructors strive to achieve. Including more engaging learning environments to improve teaching and learning is ideal. Within courses, it has been demonstrated that in-class group activities lend themselves as a method to increase comprehension about the group process and respectively the course content (Humphrey, 2014; Pugh, 2014). As interactions between diverse individuals become increasingly prominent it is crucial for individuals to better navigate social interaction in diverse environments. Additionally, it is critical that students gain understanding about the impact of diverse group membership, the group process, and develop the knowledge and skills to facilitate the many emerging groups with diverse members (Fernandes & Poltzer, 2015). In the classroom setting, group projects and group activities have long been supported to enhance the learning environment (Humphrey, 2014). Activities to further engage students in groups promotes enhanced academic development for students. This paper examines the use of a classroom activity to support student learning, awareness and sensitivity to working with diverse group members.

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Engaged Learning and Activities to Enhance Learning

Students in a wide range of disciplines benefit from engaged learning (Kolb, 1984; Clements & Minnick, 2012; Cramer, Ryosho, & Nguyen, 2012) and activities (Lichtenwalter & Baker, 2010; Rosenwald, Smith, Bagnoli, Riccelli, Ryan, Salcedo & Seeland, 2013). Clements and Minnick (2012) found experiential groups to be beneficial for participating undergraduate students. Students reported gaining understanding of the group stage concepts, skills, and benefits through their own experience in the group process. Obtaining and sharing new ideas creates engaging learning environments in the classroom and contributes to student success and retention. Ebner & Holtzinger (2007) found the use of games in teaching to be fun, which, they suggest, contributes to the efficacy of the teaching method.

Game-based learning has been used to enhance student understanding/learning through interactive experiences (Lichtenwalter & Baker, 2010). Lichtenwalter and Baker (2010) used the game Jenga to teach undergraduate students about oppression, having each stacking block represent different aspects of society (health care, nutrition, poverty) and the potential impact on various areas of an individual's life; creating an unstable situation when certain key elements are removed. For example, removing wealth creates poverty. This mentally engaging game helped to improve students understanding of structural oppression (Lichtenwalter & Baker, 2010). Similarly, King & Cazessus (2018) found the inclusion of the educational board game, AudaCity, can be beneficial in teaching about political power, group dynamics, and economic stratification which is beyond the intended focus of urban developmental patterns and social construction.

Courses that focus on group work should incorporate frequent engaging activities for optimal student learning (Furman, Bender, & Rowan, 2014). Furthermore, engaging activities have been reported to be beneficial when teaching about diversity (Horwath & Thurlow 2004).

Diversity

The globalization and growth in diversity emphasizes the need for professionals to be prepared to work with individuals who are different (Abreu, 2014). While there is some evidence that incorporating diversity elements within the curriculum are effective (Grise-Owens, Cambron, Valade, 2010), teaching diversity continues to be a challenge (Abrams & Noio, 2009; Snyder, Peeler & May, 2008). As Wilson, Rapin & Haley-Banez (2004) assert, all group work is multicultural. Therefore, differences amongst members will exist in all groups. As a result, individuals need to consider appropriate training for awareness to work with diverse group members.

As communities become increasingly diverse, individuals including group facilitators are required to become adept at working with different populations. For many years, it has been recommended that sensitivity and awareness related to diversity are needed throughout the college curriculum (Hansman, Jackson, Grant, & Spencer, 1999). Sanner, Baldwin, Cannella, and Charles (2010) found that the combination of lecture and interactive sessions helped to promote students' openness to diversity. Kratze, and Bertolo (2013) found that intercultural experiential exposure helped participants gain a culturally sensitive approach and better understand the connection between academic preparation and diverse environments application.

Additionally, research supports the benefits of diverse membership in groups. Groups with diverse members have demonstrated to offer innovative, interesting perspectives and approaches to the other members (Fluhr, 2005; Osteen, Vanidestine, & Sharpe, 2013). Diverse group members can lend powerful insights and different perspectives to each other throughout the group process and encourage members to think, reflect, and work, contributing to the natural progression of the group process.

Self-reflection is an essential element to learning about diversity (Lee & Fortune, 2013). Group facilitators also need to be aware of the issues that can arise when diversity exists in a group setting, specifically any conflict or tension which can occur during the normal group progress. Group facilitators need to explore group conflict and collaborative models for effective group growth (Davis, Galinsky, & Schopler, 1995; Cramer, Ryosho, & Nguyen, 2012). Yalom (2005) discusses the importance of developing cohesiveness between group members in order to progress and do the work that needs to be accomplished for each group member. Fluhr (2005) shares

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the value of creating connections between diverse group members through non-threatening non-personal experiences which allow the members to develop discussions about deeper areas of personal interest.

Group Work

Providing an effective and engaging classroom environment enhances students' understanding of general group concepts, especially when combined with high-impact practices such as field practice and intensive classroom practice (Kuh, 2008; Humphrey, 2014). Shenaar-Golan and Gutman (2013) suggest educators have a strong role in eliciting interest, and subsequently commitment, from students about the value of groups. Applying specific teaching methodologies related to groups influences students' perceptions. Group projects have been shown to contribute the most learning when an equitable division of the labor occurred. As a result, less group conflict developed (Postlethwait, 2016). Similarly, it has been found that students gained an overall value of group work being worthwhile (for productivity and decision-making) and the peer values of skills and collaboration (Williamson-Ashe & Ericksen, 2017). Educators can make a strong impact on students' perceptions of group work; therefore it is essential to create an interesting, interactive environment to engage students in the group material. Ando (2017) found students wanted more time for small-group interactions related to diversity processing following participation in a diversity event. Group member discussions encourages processing between the participants. Furthermore, it has been found that small-group interactions encourage cognitive adaptation to diversity (Pugh, 2014). Ultimately, using classroom group work activities helps students better comprehend group work as a participant and potential facilitator.

Context-Apples to Apples (A2A) Adaptation

This research examined the impact of a group activity (adapted Apples to Apples game) on the perceived learning of social work graduate students in the area of group work with diverse members. Given the literature findings, the specific learning goals for this teaching technique/group activity included:

1. Participants would be able to *describe* the impact of diverse members on group work and *apply* this

knowledge to enhance their group facilitation skills.

2. Participants would be able to *describe* self-awareness of their own stereotypes and *apply* this knowledge to enhance their interactions in a diverse group member setting.

3. Participants would be able to *describe* different types of diversity and *apply* this knowledge to enhance their interactions in a diverse group member setting.

Specifically, a small adaptation of the game, Apples to Apples (Mattel, 2007) was implemented with the intent/ purpose to teach the importance of the consideration of facilitating groups with diverse members. Apples to Apples is a widely available board game targeting families for distribution and can be played with a small group of 4 or large crowd of 10 individuals taking 30 minutes to 2 hours to play.

There were two distinct components to the class session dedicated to diverse group membership. The first part of the class included a Power Point lecture and discussion. During a slides-based lecture, a basic introduction to diversity terms was provided. Many terms related to diversity are interrelated and used interchangeably. The following definitions were provided to the participants during the lecture. *Diversity* refers to the state of being different or dissimilar including consideration of race, gender, education level, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, religion, etc. As Broome (2003) asserts, although individuals can be described by their race, gender, ethnicity or another 'group' they belong to, it is critical that we take into account the individual differences that make each person unique. *Culture* is "an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, language, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships, and expected behaviors of racial, ethnic, religious, or social group and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations" (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2012). *Ethnicity* is defined as a segment of a larger population but is seen as a distinct group based on a shared social experience by living in the same place of origin (Sheafor & Horejski, 2012). *Race* is a social construct that goes beyond the classification of

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people based on their readily observable physical characteristics including skin color, hair color/texture and body structure (Sheafor & Horejski, 2012). *Ethnocentric* refers to the judgement of other people's culture using one's own perceived superior culture (Ashford, LeCroy, & Williams, 2018).

Brief commercial videos were shared to exemplify the change in public discussion of diversity [Christmas Commercial (Caucasian family of four)-1980 vs. Holiday Commercial (Caucasian single parents, African American multiple generation families) – 2014]. For the remaining ninety minutes the group activity, a slightly adapted Apples to Apples game, was incorporated into the class. Graduate students were informed that for the remainder of class, they were going to play the game. During a previous class session, students voluntarily signed consent forms for participation in teaching techniques activities. A script was used to explain the game and specific alterations were provided in writing to each of the four (4) small groups (4-5 people in each group). Apples to Apples is a card game of comparisons with the goal of winning as many red (noun) cards as possible. The game consists of two decks of cards, a red deck where each card is printed with a noun and a green deck where each card is printed with an adjective. A different player acts as the judge for each round. Each player is dealt 7 green (adjective) cards. The judge selects one red (noun) card and displays it for all players to see. Each player selects what they think is the best green (adjective) card from their hand to match the word on the noun card (red) and places it face down in a pile. The judge then reads out loud each adjective card and selects the one that they think best depicts the noun card. The person who placed the adjective card in the pile "wins" the noun card, with the objective of gathering as many noun cards as possible. A new round is then started with a new judge and a new noun card. For example, if the judge shows the word tree (noun card), students would look at their hand of cards (adjective cards) and select the best word, from their cards, they think matches such as "natural"," rare", or "country". Students were informed that the judge role was similar to a group facilitator role.

For the adapted version of Apples to Apples students received written instructions to abide by noted rules for the game. These adaptations were intentionally focused on different aspects of diversity. Specifically, the judge

role matched the learning objectives as discussed above. After 45 minutes of playing the game, students were asked to reconvene as a larger group to process and reflect on their experience. The 'discussion' in the description below included the noted diversity points related to each round for processing with the larger group.

The judge roles changed each round and included the following: Round 1 "The *judge* (facilitator) must evaluate the red card based upon the point of view of *someone living in poverty*". The facilitator takes on a role based on their own prejudices and stereotypes. Discussion: Stereotypes can interfere with effective interactions and productivity in a group, especially as the facilitator. Remembering each individual is unique is essential and using professional guidelines to guide our behaviors/interactions is critical (goal- *self-awareness*.)

Round 2 "Players are permitted to try to convince the *judge* (facilitator) why their card should be selected." Players' own values and perspectives naturally guide their convincing arguments here. Discussion: It is not always known what ideas, perspectives, and backgrounds members are bringing to group with them. The more group members learn about each other the more effective they can interact together. This permits individuals to be more productive and successful (goal-*diverse group member impact*). Round 3 "The green adjective cards are selected randomly by each player and given to the judge (facilitator) *before* the red noun word card is presented". Discussion: when you are not aware of differences or the situation, it can be difficult to effectively work together. The more you know about your leader, the situation and clients the more effective outcomes possible (goal: *diversity awareness)*. Following general discussion specific to each round (noted above), additional prompts to examine the learning objectives included: What did they think of the game (*engaging, enjoyable*)? Would they use this game in a group? How was this game like a group? (*diversity awareness*) What was the purpose of this group? (*group work with diverse members*) How did your own beliefs and attitudes impact the group interactions (*self-awareness*)? What else did they learn?

Method of Evaluation

This evaluation research was conducted at a four-year public Historically Black College and University

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(HBCU) located in the south-eastern region of the United States of America with an approximate size of 5,000 students, including undergraduate and graduate students. Participants were graduate social work students in one section of an advanced applied group skills practice class, an elective course. All students attending class during this session participated in the group activity. Therefore the convenience sample for the survey included seventeen student participants (N=17) who volunteered out of a potential 20 enrolled students. Student participants were asked to participate in the brief survey during class time (approximately 5-7 minutes to complete). Data was collected during the Spring semester from the survey distributed at the end of the three hour diversity class session. The survey was retained separately from the consent form, to maintain confidentiality. Student participants were voluntary and were informed they could revoke their participation at any time. In addition, each consent form noted "If you choose not to participate, your enrollment in the Applied Group Skills course will continue without interruption without any consequence". The survey included six (6) Likert scale items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and five (5) open-ended questions to examine students' perceived learning, the learning environment, and the most effective class session components related to diversity and group work (see Appendix A for the Survey Instrument). Content and narrative analysis was used to examine the data. Grounded theory guided the data coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). The narrative data was hand-coded for emerging themes and patterns, with categories developing within broader themes. The qualitative data was examined for frequency and significance (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that this course was an elective, advanced groups graduate class, therefore students selected this course, had a natural interest in groups, and already had foundational course work in groups. In addition, the researcher was also the instructor for the course which could impact favorable results and social desirability bias. More robust research including a larger sample size and pre-test would provide a measurable impact of participation in the A2A activity. Specifically, administering the adapted Apples to Apples game with graduate social work students not taking the

advanced groups course would be valuable. Measuring the skill use within future groups could help determine if behaviors and skills changed due to the student's exposure and participation in the activity. Nonetheless, there is data that supports evidence from the findings related to valuable outcomes.

Findings

Using systematic comparison of the results, a number of themes emerged from the data (see Table 1). The prominent themes included, *group member diversity knowledge/awareness, group skills* (categories: general group skills, skills with diverse group members), *reflection and process* and *positive learning environment*. These emerging themes demonstrate the learning goals were met as noted as well as some additional outcomes.

Group member diversity knowledge/awareness (goal- diversity awareness). For this research, one prominent emerging theme in the data was the increase in *diversity group work knowledge/awareness.* Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed the respondent's ability to describe the importance of being aware of group member diversity. From the data, no one reported that diversity awareness is not important in group work. Five survey respondents described an increase in their knowledge/awareness related to diversity. One survey respondent clearly demonstrated the impact of the A2A game-based experience "…involved diversity. It made me become aware of people's attitudes, perspectives, feelings etc.". Another respondent shared the new knowledge they gained from the activity of "seeing all the different types of diversity; diversity applies to more things then I usually think of initially". Survey data including "….learning from people's perspectives and how they perceive certain information" support the finding of an increase in group member ability to describe their diversity knowledge/awareness. Similarly, fifty-three percent (53%) reported they *agree* while forty-one percent (41%) strongly agree it is important to be aware and take group member diversity into consideration when working in groups. Participants reported an increase in understanding about diversity and the impact of ethnicity and culture during their honest reflections. During large group processing one participant admitted being "surprised someone with the same ethnic background could think so differently about things such as the word

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'playground'…now I recognize their culture and gender impacted their view". This demonstrates the respondent's ability to describe the value of diversity in groups.

Group skills (goal- group work with diverse members). The group skills theme included two categories: general group skills and skills with diverse group members. Some participants acknowledged the value of gaining general group skills through the A2A activity and other survey respondents noted their increased skills pertaining to an emphasis about the diverse group members. Survey respondents reported they obtained *general group skills* through active learning as demonstrated with the following comment: "….using examples within the class of what we experience". The data supports respondent's ability to apply the information through learned skills.

Skills with diverse group members. Four survey respondents acknowledged the adapted Apples to Apples activity as valuable to their skill development, specifically application of skills with diverse group members. Supporting remarks such as "We were able to have the experience then reflect on our experience while applying it to diversity." They realized "how diversity can show up in subtle ways and how we can address it in a group setting" demonstrates the emerging theme of skills with diverse group members by respondents. Furthermore, one survey respondent made the clear indication of application of the material by stating "[diversity] concepts were all familiar but, applying them to a group activity helped me see how they can play out in groups". This was demonstrated when the judge (facilitator) admitted her own cultural experience impacted her interactions with a group member's clashing association with the noun card "cheese sandwich." The judge said "oh that reminds me of home…when I was sick, my mom always brought me a cheese sandwich" while one group member shared she "hated cheese sandwiches because that's what you got when you didn't have any money for lunch at school… in a brown bag." Upon reflection, the judge (facilitator) realized that she began to negatively evaluate the adjective card "disgusting," not knowing the complete story behind the reason for its selection. The judge explained she could see how her response could impact the group interactions and the need to monitor self-disclosure and practice effective listening as the facilitator (highlighting cultural experiences, socio-economic status, stereotypes, and self-awareness).

Reflection and process (goal-self-awareness). One area of value expressed by respondents was the opportunity to reflect and process the activity with the class. Some individuals validated this importance when they shared "processing classmates experiences with diversity helped me understand" and "we were able to have the experience then reflect on our experience while applying it to diversity". The reflection and discussion about the activity was a critical component to the ability to apply the content reported by the participants.

Observations of the small group interactions during the A2A game-based activity revealed interesting dynamics which provided valuable group processing and learning. Different individual group members expressed frustrations when the current judge/facilitator did not select their adjective card and occasionally a group member would argue and debate, providing a reason why their card should be selected, while some even asserted "you're wrong, you should have picked my card". During the class reflection and discussion, individuals began to acknowledge and describe their own challenges with not taking others' perspectives into consideration. Upon reflection, some student comments acknowledged the value in knowing someone better in the small group and therefore being able to more likely "guess" the adjective they might select. Furthermore, they could now understand how knowing about the diversity of the group members contributes to effective group facilitation. One student felt there was a generational and cultural barrier (diversity) in her small group since she was unaware of one of the nouns presented on the card while other group members discussed various meanings/interpretations of the term. Other students admitted they selected an adjective they themselves would prefer and attempted to convince the judge/facilitator of their own perspective. It was during the large group processing that many students began to understand the intent of the A2A activity: to experience a group with diverse membership and describe and apply factors that contribute to effective facilitation with diverse group members. Many participants validated the benefit of the activity interactions with remarks such as "more interesting because it was interactive" and the activity "helped me see things from another person's perspective".

Positive learning environment. Another interesting emerging theme of a positive learning environment was

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reported by all survey respondents. When asked to respond on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to "The class learning environment was enjoyable today", twenty-four percent (24%) responded they *Agree* while seventy-six percent (76%) reported they *Strongly Agree,* therefore, all responses were positive.

For the open-ended survey question "If I had to use one word to describe the learning environment today I would say it was:" all positive terms were used to describe the learning environment as noted in Table 1. A positive learning environment was supported by both narrative and Likert Scale data from the survey.

THEMES (LEARNING GOALS)	CATEGORIES	DATA/QUOTES
Group member diversity knowledge/awareness (learning goal: describe diverse group member impact)		"…involved diversity. It made me become aware of people's attitudes, perspectives, feelings etc." "seeing all the different types of diversity; diversity applies to more things then I usually think of initially". "….learning from people perspective and how they perceive certain information".
Group Skills (learning goal: group work application with diverse members)	General Group Skills	"….using examples within the class of what we experience".
	Skills with Diverse Group Members	"We were able to have the experience then reflect on our experience while applying it to diversity". "how diversity can show up in subtle ways and how we can address it in a group setting". "[diversity] concepts were all familiar but, applying them to a group activity helped me see how they can play out in groups".
Reflection and process (learning goal: describe and apply self-awareness)		"processing classmates experiences with diversity helped me understand". "we were able to have the experience then reflect on our experience while applying it to diversity".
Positive learning environment		Informative (4 respondents), Interesting (4 respondents), Engaging (2 respondents), Fun (2 respondents). One (1) respondent for each of the following terms: Enjoyable, Entertaining, Supportive, and Open.

Table 1. Prominent emerging common themes related to diverse group member activity

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Discussion and Implications

The adapted Apples to Apples game-based activity was created to develop awareness and sensitivity to diverse group members through participation in a small group work educational setting. It was structured to be facilitated as a small group activity to enhance students' awareness and increase their ability to work with diverse group members. Learning goals were achieved and match many of the emerging themes from the data (noted below and in Table 1).

Participants report gains about group member diversity awareness (learning goals- diversity awareness, and group work with diverse members). Specific types of diversity indicate this activity to be a valuable method to develop this knowledge. It is essential to prepare students to work effectively with groups, and specifically areas such as diverse membership (Horwath & Thurlow 2004; Cramer, Ryosho, & Nguyen, 2012). The benefits of groups with diverse members were found in these results as innovative insights were shared amongst group members which support the research findings (Osteen, Vanidestine, & Sharpe, 2013).

Discussion and processing of the activity reinforced the findings about the impact diversity contributes to an individual's experiences, lived perspective, and group elements and supported the learning goal of self-reflection. These lived experiences can also lead to the development of stereotypes and prejudices which can impact group interactions. Student reflection and processing (emerging theme) of the adapted A2A was important to incorporate and matches the literature suggesting reflection during group game-based learning is important to include for better student comprehension (Cruz & Patterson, 2005; Kiili, 2007).

Finally, results offer an activity to engage students in group work with diverse members to contribute to the learning process through active participation in group game-based instruction. The literature supports the value of game-based learning activities (Lichtenwalter & Baker, 2010) and this research furthers the idea of the positive impact of learning about group work with diverse members through engaging activities for students (Ebner & Holzinger, 2007).

The teaching activity engaged students in a group experience with diverse members that provided an effective learning process. The reported results from the adapted A2A game-based learning activity found students perceived they had gained knowledge and awareness, as well as both general group skills and skills with diverse group members. This research was completed with an advanced graduate level group work course which was elective and presumably students would have an interest in groups. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct further research with undergraduate students and student populations outside a group work course to determine the impact of the game-based learning activity. Future research could include a larger sample size and population (across curriculums) to further extend the data.

Conclusion

The findings from this research indicate participants found the adapted A2A game to increase their knowledge/awareness about the types of diversity and impact of diverse members in groups. Many educational environments and disciplines can benefit from an understanding about diverse group membership. With diversity increasing in our global society, these research findings can be beneficial for various students in many disciplines as participants in groups. Business students can learn how to best lead groups with diverse membership for effective marketing outcomes. Education majors can benefit from understanding diverse membership in large and small groups for classroom interaction considerations. Helping professions (psychology, sociology, social work and human services) can gain insight about how to facilitate groups with diverse membership to address the needs of the members (counseling, support, and psychoeducational). Furthermore, the workforce is becoming much more collaborative (Broome, 2003) and interdisciplinary teams are becoming increasingly frequent. Therefore, all current students will participate in future interdisciplinary professional task groups, where diverse membership is likely (Keyton & Heylen, 2017). Additionally, participants gained some beginning application of skills for groups with diverse members. Practicing effective group work with diverse members in an education setting enhances later professional interactions in diverse groups.

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Finding ways to enhance student interest, understanding, and retention for course content is optimal. Students perceived their learning and retention of information was strong. Therefore, implementation of this teaching activity can potentially provide a positive learning experience with knowledge and skill gains in working with diverse group members for many disciplines. This supports Ebner and Holzinger's (2007) idea that fun learning environments contribute to the retention of information and engaging learning activities are valuable (Kolb, 1984). Introduction of the A2A adapted activity offers one tool to effectively engage students in their awareness about types of diversity, develop self-awareness regarding stereotypes, and facilitate groups with diverse group membership to enhance the impact for students.

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Educational Instruction *continued*

Appendix A

Engaging Directions and Learning Perceptions for Social Work Education

Perceived Learning Survey

University

How much of the diversity information from today's class do you think you will be able to recall? Circle one.

- 0% (none of it)
- 20%
- 40%
- 60%
- 80%
- 100% (all of it)

Please pick the response that most closely relates to your response using the Likert scale provided:

5 point Likert-type scale

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

This diversity class session was very organized.

1   2   3   4   5

This diversity class session was very effective.

1   2   3   4   5

I think I learned the diversity information presented in class today.

1   2   3   4   5

My level of interest in the diversity content shared during today's class is very strong.

1   2   3   4   5

After today's class I feel I understand the importance of being aware of diversity in groups.

1   2   3   4   5

The class learning environment was enjoyable today.

1   2   3   4   5

If I had to use **one word** to describe the learning environment today I would say it was:
Please explain.

What was the most effective diversity teaching technique from today's class? Please explain.

What was most beneficial from the diversity segment for today's class? Please explain.

What could have been improved about the diversity segment from today's class? Please explain.

Please describe your previous knowledge level about the diversity content shared during today's class. (None, Some, Expert). Please explain.

TEACHING REPORTS

The Threshold Concept Map: Plotting the Liminal Space of Students' Struggle to Learn to Write in College

—Bryna Siegel Finer, Emily Wender, Oriana Gatta, and Dan Weinstein

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A former middle and secondary school English teacher, Dr. Wender teaches courses in composition and English Education. Her published work has appeared in *English Journal*, *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, *The ALAN Review*, *Journal of Writing Assessment*, and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College,* among others.

Oriana Gatta is Assistant Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Gatta's research is grounded in the rhetorical analysis of ideology as it functions in print and digital genres of popular culture, and her pedagogy works towards moving students from passive consumption, to critique, to the conscious production of print and digital media designed to reflect their own ideological perspectives.

Dan Weinstein is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Weinstein teaches courses in digital and technical writing at IUP. His research, positioned at the intersection of educational technology and the psychology of creativity, tends to focus on how teachers may best use new technologies to help students prosper as learners and creators.

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

Abstract

Drawing on thresholds concepts in composition and education, the authors developed a mapping instrument to generate visual understandings of students' struggles with troublesome knowledge. They present a case study using the map to plot one student's learning through three pieces of writing. The map visually demonstrates experiences with troublesome knowledge and movement within a detailed threshold space. Mapping reveals the potential importance of previous identities in confronting threshold concepts and the use-value of visually representing student learning. Results suggest ways to further explore students' struggles and reinforce the role of oscillation in the learning process.

Keywords

threshold concepts, struggle, liminality, postmodern mapping, oscillation, reflection, FYC

The Threshold Concept Map: Plotting the Liminal Space of Students' Struggle to Learn to Write in College

For decades, researchers have been studying threshold concepts, those concepts that encourage transformational learning. Higher education researchers Meyer and Land (2006) have explained a threshold concept as:

> akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview. This *transformation* may be sudden or it may be protracted over a considerable period of time, with the transition to understanding proving *troublesome*. (emphasis added, p.3)

More simply put, in order for learning to occur—a transformation—a student must struggle with a concept and overcome that struggle; sometimes, the struggle is particularly challenging, or "troublesome." Developing effective teaching methods requires identifying evidence of how students negotiate troublesome knowledge.

As full-time English professors at a mid-size public university that admits more than 93% of its applicants, we (the authors) each see many underprepared students; many are first-generation, and about 16% of entering first-year students require support before taking English 101. Learning to write in college involves a diverse range of struggles arising from encounters with unfamiliar contexts, genres, and audiences. These struggles involve determining how to engage with others' ideas using familiar and new writing strategies and how to generate new ideas (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, p.59); learning also necessitates metacognition, typically taught in composition class through reflective writing. We ask students to "articulate their struggles and successes" in ways that both document learning and create opportunities for learning transfer (Dasbender, 2016, p. 295).

These characterizations of the role struggle plays in learning imply that all students 1) understand and accept the connection between learning and struggle, 2) can al-

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

ways identify the opportunities to struggle with which we present them, and 3) are always willing and able to engage in productive struggle. For many of the students we teach at our university, these characterizations are aspirational; our students' writing more often evidences an apparent absence of struggle, or as Timmermans (2010) has suggested, the presence of struggle against learning (p. 3). Our work as teachers, then, involves facilitating students' movement toward a willingness to struggle when asked to identify, understand, and engage with new and unfamiliar strategies and concepts.

Drawing on Adler-Kassner and Wardle's 2015 *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (*NWWK*), in which thirty-seven threshold concepts were developed by various scholars and pedagogues in the discipline of writing studies, we ask, "How might we use threshold concepts to help us understand students' struggles in learning to write?" Our understanding of threshold concepts as potential sites of struggle, along with scholarship on the relationship between struggle and learning, made us wonder if we could develop a strategy-- perhaps even an instrument -- to examine our students' writing that gives us more information about their struggles and suggests ways we might more effectively teach them to navigate the "transformative" space between struggle and learning.

Hence, we discuss the process by which we developed a mapping instrument and strategy that offers opportunities to generate more nuanced understandings of how students work through troublesome knowledge. We present a case study of one student, using the map to plot her writing across a semester. In the end, we discuss how this mapping instrument can help instructors in any discipline work with students to make transformations through troublesome moments. In the section that follows, we combine a description of the creation of the Threshold Concepts Map with the scholarship that informed it.

Struggle, Thresholds, and Instruments

Selecting Threshold Concepts

In order to let student writing guide our process, we first identified the concepts we knew we were working with the most in our Composition I course by individ-

ually sorting each of the thirty-seven threshold concepts from *NWWK* into one of the following three categories:

1. In my Composition I class, I *do not* typically see my students aware of or struggling with the concept.

2. In my Composition I class, I *do* typically see my students aware of or struggling with the concept.

3. In my Composition I class, I *would like to* see my students aware of or struggling with the concept.

When we compared our individual categorizations, we looked for overlap in concepts we placed into category two, narrowing the list of thirty-seven to ten that we all associated with awareness and/or struggle.

Using the corpus of student writing we had collected (samples from students from our Fall 2015 English 101 sections from whom we had obtained signed IRB consent), we individually read for evidence of the ten shared threshold concepts we could consistently see. In discussions, we used selective coding (Charmaz, 2014) to develop lists of what we expected to see in student writing as evidence of each of the concepts. When finished, we determined that 1.3, "Writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader," was the concept we were able to identify with the most consistency in multiple samples and with ample evidence. A key feature of 1.3 is found in "the dynamic relation of writer, reader, and text" (Bazerman, 2015, p. 22), a central tenet of our Composition I classes. Students write multiple genres and address different rhetorical situations; they are taught to productively manipulate text, understand genre conventions, be aware of audience, and have informed interactions with external contexts. Concept 1.3 also afforded us the most opportunities to identify where students struggled and if they expressed awareness of their struggle.

After reading through three samples from each of our class sections that we individually felt represented the typical quality of our students' work, we narrowed our focus to one student's writing samples to use as a case study: Leanne. We chose Leanne for a few reasons: we had enough samples of her writing to plot a few points on our map, the types of writing we had from her were

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

diverse in their purpose, and she represented to us a clear example of an average writer for our university first-year student population. We coded and eventually mapped three pieces of her writing: an early reading response that anticipated a writing assignment, a persuasive letter, and an end-of-semester reflective letter. These pieces provided a picture of a writer over a semester, across genres, and in the midst of reflection.

Developing an Instrument for Mapping Concept Application

Our instrument—the Threshold Concept Map—developed organically as we discovered that the concept of struggle itself is more complex than we originally imagined. At first, we found ourselves standing in a conference room doorway, talking about the outside of the room (i.e., no application of a concept), the inside of the room (i.e., application of the concept), or one foot in and one foot out (i.e., struggling to get through, grappling with troublesome knowledge). We drew this as a continuum—a straight line with "no awareness" at one end, "understanding" at the other (see Figure 1).

But, as we tried to plot Leanne's writing on the continuum, the tension between application and what we first referred to as "understanding" challenged us to move beyond thinking about struggle as a continuum of application and instead as a convergence and divergence of application (i.e., what a student could do as a writer) and reflection (i.e., how they could talk about writing and their decisions as a writer). Thus, we realized that we needed a way to decipher when a student was able to describe a concept but unable to apply it fully, or vice versa. This led us to construct a cartesian plane on which we could plot students' struggle across two intersecting axes (representing two continua) and in four separate quadrants, with varying degrees of struggle and beyond struggle on either side of the actual threshold. The threshold became a box representing a space where a student might oscillate as they struggled. Thus, on our map, the x-axis represents students' ability to apply a skill or concept taught in class, and the y-axis represents students' reflection or perceptions of how they (or other writers) accomplished that application (see Figure 2).

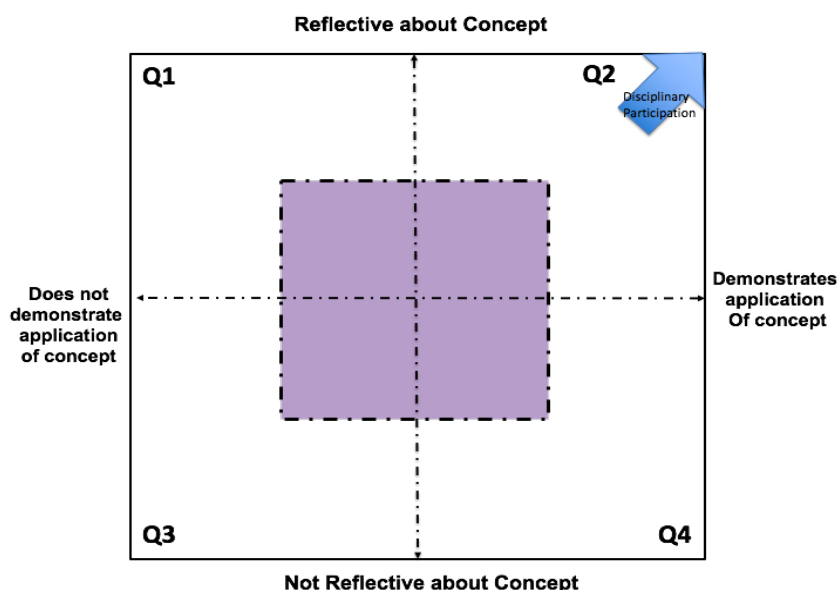Figure 1: Threshold Concept Continuum

Figure 2: Threshold Concept Plane

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

To think about threshold concept 1.3, "Writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader," in two dimensions required us to distinguish between how a writer applies the concept and how the writer reflects on the concept. As Bazerman (2015) explained, threshold concept 1.3 captures the communicative function of writing:

> The potential of making and sharing meaning provides both the motive and guiding principle of our work in writing and helps us shape the content of our communications. Awareness of this potential starts early in emergent literacy experiences and continues throughout one's writing life [...] The idea that writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader can be troublesome because there is a tension between the expression of meaning and the sharing of it. (p. 22)

We reread multiple examples of that evidence to determine the patterns, or writing moves, that signaled both application of and reflection of 1.3.

Because we read different genres in our analysis, we identified the application of 1.3 through a broad list of indicators: appropriate language for the audience, acknowledgement of the audience and their needs, recognizable purposes and goals, elaborations of details that support those purposes, effective structural decisions, powerful word choice, and overall coherence and development. To identify a writer's ability to *reflect* on 1.3, we looked for a student's awareness of the potential choices writers might make or have made, captured in moments of description of how writers' choices affect audiences. We paid particular attention to conditional language in these descriptions (such as "could" or "might"), suggesting that a writer recognized multiple alternatives that would serve readers in different ways. We also looked for exploration of a writer's purposes and of connecting writing processes (such as revision) to writing goals, relationships with readers, and outcomes for readers.

Our mapping strategy began to appear similar to methodologies in postmodern geography; although not entirely the same, our practice converges with postmodern mapping by showing "the ways that multiple framings (disciplinary, methodological, researcher-researched relationships, and so on) enter into the inquiry" (Sullivan & Porter, p.75). We also took a page from White-Farnham, Dyehouse, and Siegel Finer (2012), who used a similar technique to map interactions of writing center tutoring sessions. They asked, "What does oscillation between facilitative and directive tutoring strategies *look like* in particular sessions?" (emphasis added). We imagined using a map of a student's writing in a conference to show a student what her learning *looks like* across quadrants over time. We also considered how we might use the mapping technique to look at different students simultaneously, perhaps as a formative assessment of our teaching or to provide feedback to an entire class.

The Liminal Space

As we began mapping student writing, it became evident that the middle box—the threshold, the struggle—was too reductive; the exact spot in the box was too hard to pin down. We paused our pilot mapping to flesh out that space; we wanted the "struggle" space to be more concrete and comprehensive. We began to think about all of the choices a student makes when they are struggling, whether consciously or unconsciously. What really goes on in that box?

Using apt descriptors for struggle, Dewey (1910) described reflection as "active" and "persistent," terms both of which suggest the embodied experience of effortful focus—similar to what we are thinking of as the conscious and unconscious choices that writers make. Dewey was clear that "perplexity, hesitation, doubt" initiate reflective thought. For Dewey, when a belief or idea is problematized or destabilized—when we're suddenly not sure about something—reflection kicks in. Dewey described it metaphorically:

> Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road* situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives. As long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another, or as long as we permit our imagination to entertain fancies at pleasure, there is no call for reflection. Difficulty or obstruction in the way of reaching a belief brings us, however, to a pause. (p.9)

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

"Difficulty or obstruction" is the exigence for reflection. We realized that we needed to better account for this sequence—a recognition of difficulty leading to reflection—within the "threshold box."

Thus, at this point in our research process, we paused to add multiple dimensions to the space representing struggle or the "stuck" place (Meyer & Land, 2005; Lather, 1998). And, while it became an undertaking to untangle the stickiness, we agree with Sullivan and Porter (1997)—"the power of the mapping strategy is in showing that by mapping you can get a better handle on a messy picture" (90).

Figure three zooms in on the details of the threshold box, the middle of the two axes, and accounts for what students might bring with them and what they encounter while in the liminal space of any learning experience. What sort of choices they make while in the space determine whether a concept might either "come into view"

(Meyer & Land, 2006, p.27) or if they only get as far as inauthentic "mimicry" (Meyer & Land, 2003). These choices also determine if a student oscillates between the opportunity to challenge prior knowledge and experience (Gogan, 2013; Meyer & Land, 2005) or not challenge at all and stay, as it were, stuck (Lather, 1998).

In the liminal space students negotiate prior knowledge and experience once they have encountered new knowledge. It is also in that space that they must make choices about how to face challenges, choices that are influenced by both internal and external motivations (Meyer & Land, 2005). Ideally, students seize opportunities to move across the liminal space toward concept application and make choices to consciously demonstrate the concept in their writing. As Perkins (2006) explained, making meaning from a concept *requires* a student to struggle with it: "difficulties with concept and episteme become intertangled" (p. 44). There is no way around; to learn, one *must* pass through the box.
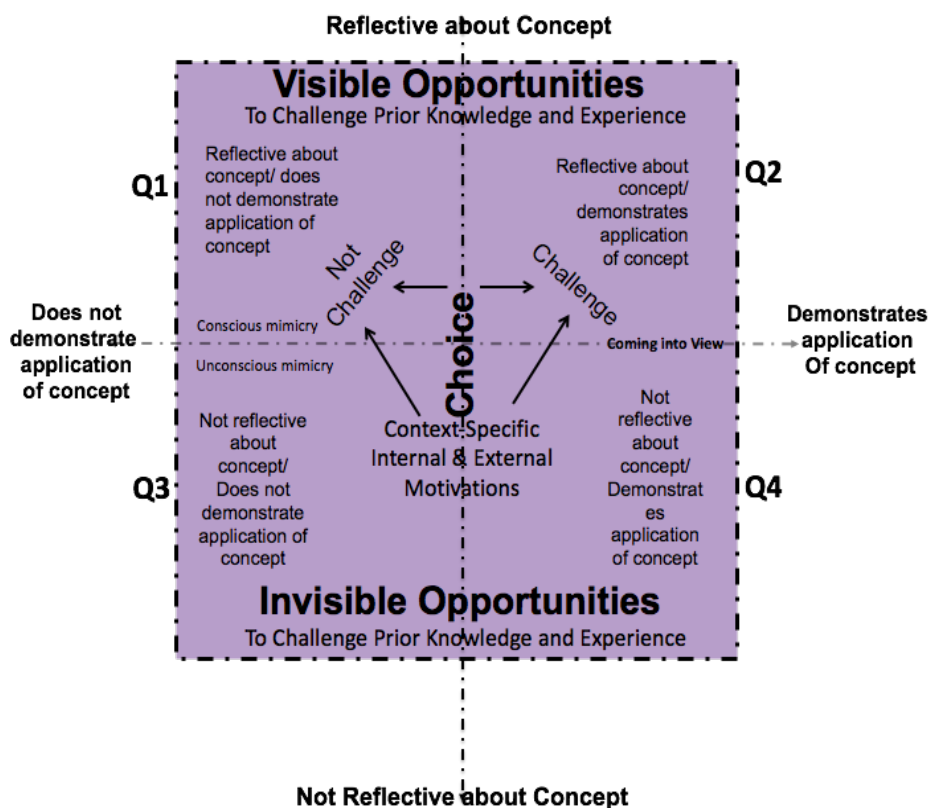

Figure 3: Zoom-in Threshold Box

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

Threshold Concept Map in Practice

A fully fleshed out model of the liminal space allowed us to better see relationships between concepts in student learning encounters and plot some practice samples on the Threshold Concept Map. We then turned to Leanne's writing in the order in which it was written.

Reading Response

As an earlier assignment for the course, we first looked at Leanne's reading response, which asked her to choose from a list of published narratives and answer: what did she learn about the genre that could shape her own writing of a narrative? The reading response, then, asked for students to put themselves in the liminal space, to consider new knowledge and its possible application.

Leanne does recognize the purpose of the assignment, adopting language that illustrates reflection. For example, note one of several uses of the word "learn" to describe her response to the essay she chose to read (by Jonathan Safran Foer):

> I also learned that I should use quotes. This will help draw the reader in, and also make me a reliable writer. Quotes will also make my writing more relatable. The reader may be able to get a more vivid image if I use quotes.

Leanne is able to reflect on the concept that writing shares and expresses meaning, expressing her awareness of a writer's relationship with an audience and the idea that writers make choices in order to reach readers. She begins by saying why a writer's choices, such as imagining a specific audience and using quotations, will make a difference for readers: it could "draw the reader in," "make me a reliable writer," "make my writing more relatable," and "the reader may be able to get a more vivid image." We applaud this list. At the same time, we note that Leanne does not develop any of these ideas throughout the response. Instead, Leanne repeats herself in different words. She seems to know writers elaborate on claims, and thus that she should write more, but she isn't sure how to make these claims more meaningful through her own elaboration. Instead, when discussing Foer, Leanne relies on long sections of quotation, suggesting she isn't sure how to discuss his text beyond simple statements of summary and identification, such as what she shares later

on: "Foer's purpose is to share about his grandmother and what she liked to do." Thus, although we see acknowledgement of how a writer's choices might impact an audience, we see little development of that idea.

One roadblock to Leanne's reflection of 1.3 includes her commitment to writing as rule-based, captured, for example, in her concluding statement, "While reading Foer's writing I was able to see how he wrote, and what I should do while I am writing my narrative writing." Leanne seems to adopt the role of "the good student" (Lunsford, 2015, p. 43), clearly bounded by the assignment (i.e., what she "should do"). Thus, we plotted Leanne's reflection of 1.3 in Q3, just inside the liminal space, not yet having identified a visible opportunity to challenge her preconceptions of writing.

Similarly, we saw her ability to demonstrate that writing shares and expresses meaning to be constructed by a reader as within that liminal space but not having crossed the threshold. Certainly, the global structure of Leanne's reading response illustrates her awareness of the signposts and sequences a reader needs—she describes Foer with quotations, names what she learned, and returns to a quotation in Foer to show something she learned. At the same time, in her reliance on overly long quotations from Foer, simple sentence structures, and basic word choice, we see a writer unable, in this rhetorical situation, to "express and articulate meanings . . . fully and precisely" (Bazerman, 2015, p. 22). In the case of this genre, reflection and demonstration are bound up together: Leanne's reading response is caught up in doing what the assignment says, which perhaps precludes thinking more deeply about the effects of writers' choices.

Overall, Leanne does have ideas about why writers made choices, but those ideas do not display "strategic reflection" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Her focus on what writing "should" do leads her to problematic conclusions that are at times antithetical to good narrative writing, such as her determination to "not leave anything out." It may be that Leanne has taken potentially troublesome knowledge and instead of initiating what Dewey characterized as active reflection, integrated new knowledge about writing into a conception of rule-based writing where there are boxes to check in order to do it right. There isn't, yet, a clear recognition of not knowing or understanding.
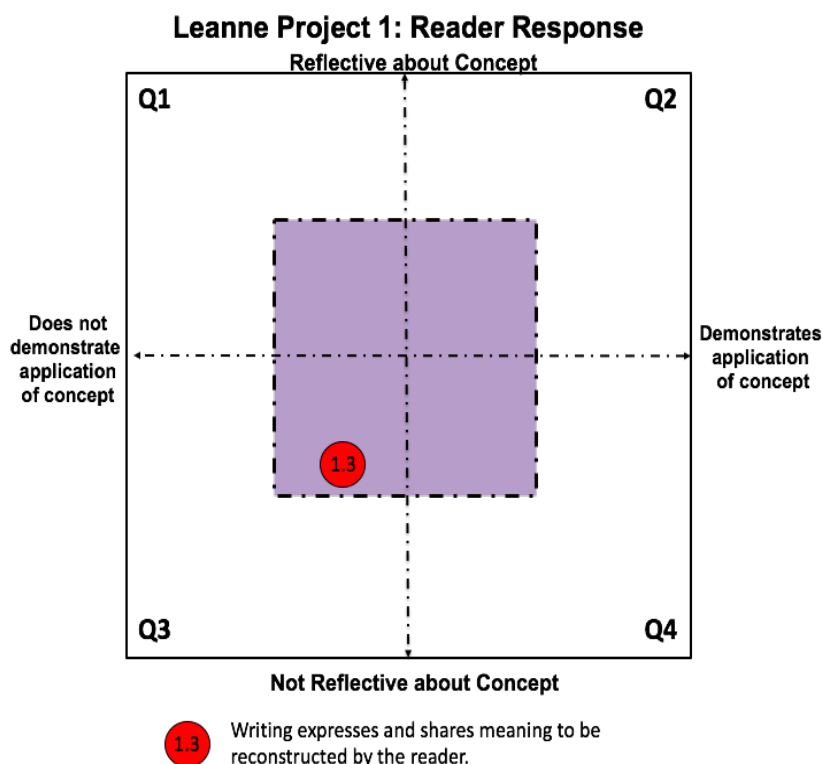
The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

Leanne Project 1: Reader Response

Figure 4: Leanne Project 1

Leanne could also be employing negative transfer—which "occurs when learning in one context impacts negatively on performance in another" (Perkins & Salomon, 1992)—of strategies perhaps learned in high school or in another course. Downs and Robertson (2015) explain that "students' dispositions and experiences often get in the way of their ability to see writing differently in college, sometimes causing them to fail at assignments for which they apply inappropriate prior knowledge" (p. 112), also an indication of negative transfer. They caution against positioning this prior knowledge as a problem to solve, and advocate instead for seeing prior knowledge or knowledge that might be negatively transferred as "troublesome," which can be challenged. The liminal space defined in the Threshold Concept Map (see Figure 3) allows for us to see if and how a student is challenging prior knowledge or if they are firmly rooted in negative transfer (outside the liminal box on the left side of the plane, as far away from the threshold as can be). In this instance, Leanne is on the left side of the plane (see Figure 4) but inside the liminal

space. She is encountering troublesome prior knowledge; she acknowledges it and integrates some new knowledge but does not challenge it.

Persuasive Letter

A later assignment asked students to request money from their parent or guardian in a letter. Students needed to argue their case, anticipating the counterarguments of their audience. Thus, to demonstrate an ability to apply 1.3, "writing shares and expresses meaning to be reconstructed by the reader," this piece demanded students to adopt persuasive structures/tropes to the particular situation, capture clear purposes and goals for their audience, and create sentences that fuel their argument with compelling evidence.

Leanne chose to address her mother about her financial and physical struggles balancing work and academics during her first year of college. She begins almost with a plea for help, describing how exhausted she is:

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

I am writing you to let you know that I am on a downhill spiral that I feels [sic] like it is never going to end. I am massively sleep deprived. I know in your mind right now you're probably thinking, "suck it up Leanne it is almost over" but mom it doesn't feel this way.

Leanne goes on to describe why she is so tired and the detrimental effects of that exhaustion:

My studies are extremely important to me but I cannot focus in class since I am not getting enough sleep. I go to work after I get out of class, so I do not get much of an option but to stay up and do my school work. Plus, I have to get up really early and drive fifty minutes to school.

Leanne's speech-like voice makes sense for a relationship that we can assume has been predominantly oral, her description of her day does seem to be information her mother genuinely might not have, and her use of greetings and closings signal that the document is indeed a letter. All features demonstrate Leanne's awareness of her audience and genre.

The letter falters, however, in its wavering purposes. The assignment required students to incorporate outside research, challenging Leanne, in this case, to shift from everyday communication with her audience, her mother. Leanne chose compelling evidence about sleep that could have helped her make the argument that working and commuting to school were negatively affecting her ability to succeed academically. As we saw in her reading response, however, Leanne does not explain her evidence or connect it to claims. Instead, she simply uses it to end paragraphs, suggesting possible warrants but not offering them. She ends her paragraph describing her schedule: "Studies have proven that more accidents happen when you are sleep deprived." She does not go on to explain that balancing her job and her commute is not only hurting her studies but is also putting her in danger.

Not unlike inserting evidence without making arguments with it, Leanne gestures to a point but never articulates it fully. The clearest request she asks for occurs in her final three lines:

Mom, I just wanted to let you know where I am at and why I feel the way I do about needing more sleep and more time to focus on my studies instead of working all of the time. I am hoping you will be understanding about the situation with my grades not being as great as they were last semester. I can't wait to come home and see you!

In her penultimate sentence, a purpose suddenly emerges—to prepare her mother for her grades—yet the rest of the letter's emphasis on lack of sleep and its ill-effects seems to build to a larger point, perhaps a request for money for school so that she can cut back on work or move to the dorms or an explanation for leaving school altogether. As a group of readers, we all shared surprise at the letter's lack of follow-through and its almost elision of what seemed to become its main point: explaining lower grades. The letter's wavering purpose suggests that Leanne, in this case, couldn't prioritize the "needs of readers" by taking full advantage of the "limited resources of written language" (Bazerman, 2015, p. 22)

These features of her letter led us to plot 1.3, "writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader," on the line between Q1 and Q3 (because there was no reflection in the assignment, we did not assess reflection); in its audience awareness, this letter demonstrates Leanne's conceptual understanding that "meaning is not transparently available" for a reader (p. 22). At the same time, in the letter's unsteady purpose and unclear attempts to incorporate outside information, it seemed that Leanne could not fully execute that understanding to create a meaningful argument.
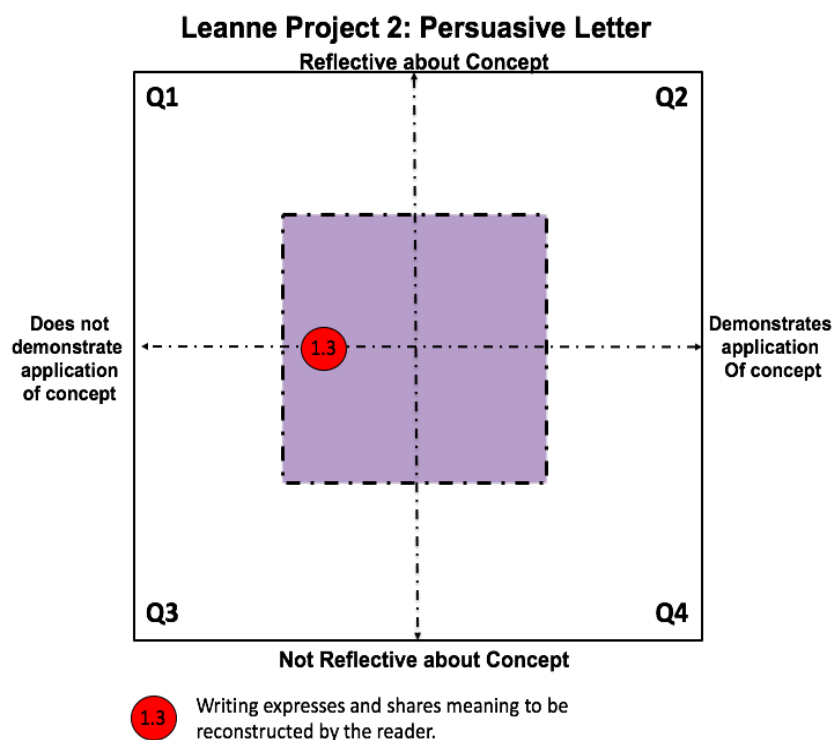
The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

Leanne Project 2: Persuasive Letter

Figure 5: Leanne Project 2

Final Reflective Letter

The final reflective letter asked students to write to their instructor using evidence from course assignments to reflect on how they met course objectives. In her letter, Leanne positions herself as someone who makes choices about her writing, recognizes the worth of rereading her own writing, and even involves others so that her writing is ultimately more meaningful for readers. Thus, although she still remains at the level of retrospective summary in this final letter, the ways she describes her writing process suggest that she is beginning to confront troublesome knowledge in the value and difficulty of writing processes as they relate to readers' experiences.

Of revision, something we expect to be new and difficult for our students, she says early on, "I do not like to write several drafts," adding, "I feel that I start to get off topic when I keep revising my projects." She then describes, however, how her friend helps her revise ("For example, at first my narrative was very boring and did not have a lot of description. Terri gave me the idea to add sensory details"), later including the revision sequence she adopted during this semester:

I like to sit down in a quiet room and read over my document. Then, I will add and edit my writing. Then after I am done I will read my document out loud. After this I wait until the next day to read it again out loud and then I turn in my final copy.

These moments of contradiction suggest that Leanne has indeed developed some initial uses for some types of revision, allowing her to better understand that "writers share and express meaning to be reconstructed by readers."

Her description of her own process indicates a sequence that illustrates "work[ing] on the words with greater care and awareness of the needs of readers" (e.g., rereading writing out loud, or talking with a friend about her writing), even though most of her claims about writing contradict this concept (Bazerman, 2015, p. 22). She dismisses writing several drafts, for example, because it makes things too complicated. She also indicates that before this class she did not know that writers "should do a lot of brainstorming activities before" writing, but she then asserts, "I found that I just like to write down my ideas that come to mind," a statement that ignores

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

the role of planning and/or exploratory prewriting. Ignoring a pre-drafting stage is especially troubling for a writer resistant to revision because it includes generating alternatives and a revisionary stance (Blau, 2003), both metacognitive actions that Leanne seems to resist overall and that would support a recognition of "writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader." Thus, in order to reflect fully on how "writers share and express meaning to be reconstructed by readers," it seems that Leanne needs to confront other supportive threshold concepts, such as 1.1, "writing is a knowledge-making activity" and 4.4, "revision is central to developing writing," both of which would allow her to use pre-writing and revision to arrive at more developed ideas and purposes, enabling her to recognize how "going off topic" might lead her to develop ideas.

We also see similar oscillation in how she demonstrates her ability to express meaning to be reconstructed by readers. For example, in discussing how her writing process has changed, Leanne picks specific examples from her writing and her actions as a writer and is able to comment on them briefly. She does not form an overall statement about her writing process that she can support

through these examples, however. In fact, it is her lack of awareness of her contradictory statements around revision and planning that make this letter somewhat confusing for readers. Thus, the letter indicates some ability to demonstrate that "writers share and express meaning to be reconstructed by readers," but it does not suggest a writer who has crossed a threshold.

Leanne has started to oscillate between the choice to struggle productively with the idea that "writers share and express meaning to be reconstructed by readers" and the choice not to struggle, which led us to graph this assignment approaching the meeting of the vertices, near the crossing of the threshold. Recognizing that "there is a natural tendency for learners to settle for particular understandings before the conceptual whole is revealed," and thus "that they need to be prepared to reevaluate their conceptions at a later date" (Land, Rattray, & Vivian, 2014, p. 209), we know the crucial Deweyan role reflection must play for Leanne in order for her to revise and deepen her understanding of concept that "writing expresses and shares meaning to be reconstructed by the reader."
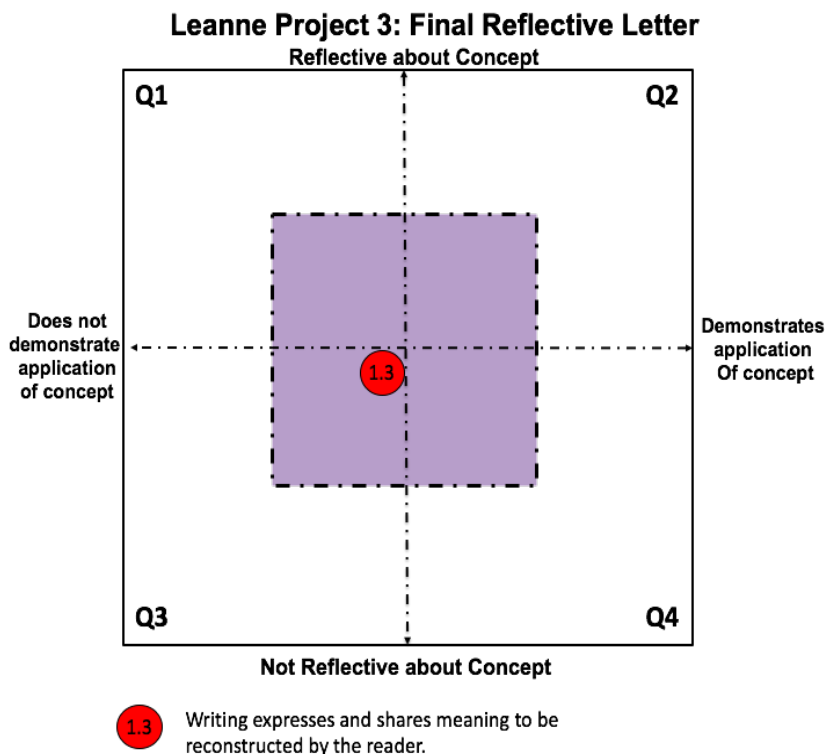

Figure 6: Leanne Project 3

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

Implications

Mapping Growth

Our original question asks, ""How might we use threshold concepts to help us understand our students' struggles in learning to write?" Looking at a composite map of Leanne's projects throughout the semester (see Figure 7) in conjunction with the threshold box detail (see Figure 3), we can begin to formulate some conclusions about Leanne's movements as a learner in the class.

At first glance, it might appear that Leanne has exhibited very little growth in her ability to "express and share meaning to be reconstructed by the reader," given that she remained in the same quadrant and within the threshold space of that quadrant throughout the course. Upon closer inspection, we see important oscillation within the threshold space that demonstrates her learning in a way that a rubric or other assessment mechanism might not be able to. She moves from the farthest corner of the threshold space in quadrant three (not reflective, not demonstrating concept) toward the center of that threshold space. Although she continues to struggle with metacognition and application of the concept, movement toward the center demonstrates some positive growth.

In all three of Leanne's pieces, we noticed the lack of development of ideas and thus the lack of clear purpose. Yet, we also see in all three assignments that Leanne was able to conform her voice, tone, and language to her audience and situation. As noted above, in her reading response, Leanne used the word "should" several times to describe what she learned from Jonathan Safran Foer about what writers *should* do, not what writers *could* do—she didn't understand Safran Foer's piece as a model of a writer who made choices, choices that she could make, adapt through her own lens, or ignore entirely. Thus, we know that Leanne is good at following directions, she understands the rules of an assignment, but she remains stuck in the threshold of quadrant three because, although we can't know why, she isn't noticing or choosing the opportunities to challenge her prior knowledge of writing as rule-based.
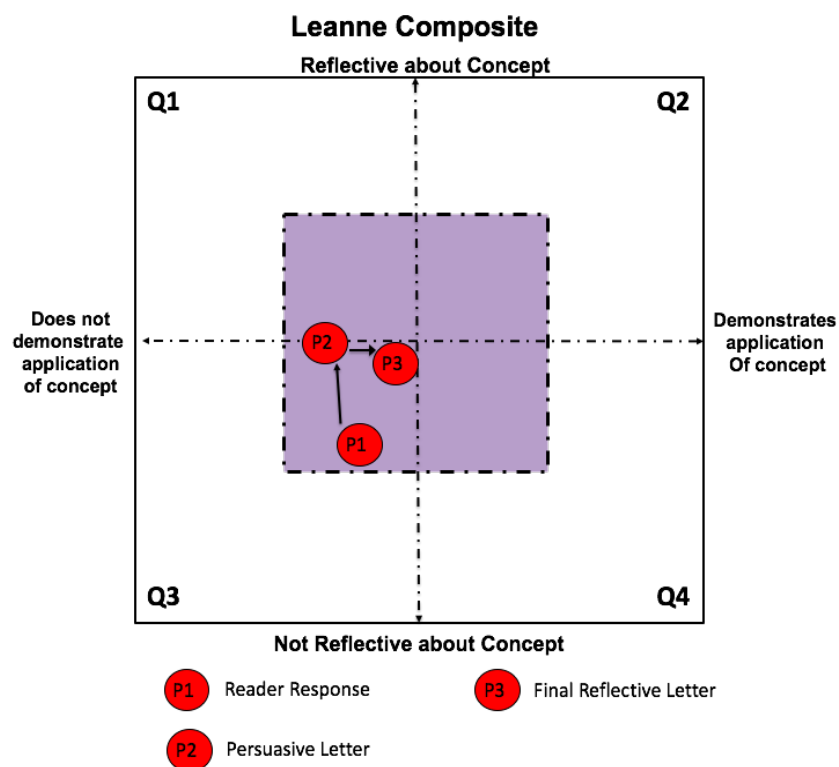

Figure 7: Leanne Composite

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

The map shows a learner who is struggling but not stuck—she is moving within the liminal space in the quadrant. The movement within suggests that with more opportunity, she could move into another quadrant, perhaps first into the threshold space of quadrant one with more reflection, and then eventually into the threshold space of quadrant two, with a combination of stronger application and metacognition. Then, perhaps, she might eventually move through the threshold into the quadrant itself. But what it also shows is that Leanne will have to choose to challenge herself to move beyond prior experience before she will really learn how to write at the college level. An instructor, now armed with an understanding of the more detailed variations of Leanne's struggle as shown on the map, could explicitly address her strategies for engaging prior experience to create new knowledge as a writer, to help her better "express and share meaning to be reconstructed by the reader." The instructor can show the student the various spaces on the map—stuck in prior knowledge or negative transfer (far left side), engaging with prior knowledge or challenging it (various areas of the liminal space), or moving beyond prior knowledge through the threshold into learning (the right side of the plane). The map allows an instructor to show a student the possible movements in a way other assignments and feedback cannot.

However, the map also helps us see that just because we give students opportunities to learn, those opportunities are not always visible to them or they may choose not to take them. We cannot assume a one-to-one correlation between opportunities presented and choices made to challenge prior knowledge and experience. Students can remain in the liminal space, "a suspended state in which understanding approximates to a kind of mimicry or lack of authenticity" (Meyer & Land, 2003, p. 10), much like Leanne's writing, which is repetitive and reliant on words that aren't her own. Downs and Robertson (2015) explain that in classrooms whose discourse is tuned to threshold concepts, a culture of experimentation and investigation should prevail, so that students would choose to challenge themselves to move through the liminal space toward transformation. But there can also be context-based variation or internal and/or external motivators for the choices students make to challenge or not challenge prior knowledge and experiences. For example, students' beliefs about themselves and/or their dispositions can lead them to make choices that will continue to reinforce their struggles (Perkins, 2000).

Crossing the Threshold

Although our project produced several takeaways and further questions, we acknowledge its limits as a single case study, one that focused solely on the reading of student writing. We practiced mapping with multiple students' writing in order to generate a strategy that worked with students of varying abilities and from various first-year composition classes, but our focus on Leanne's writing alone allowed us to paint a portrait of a single writer, which led us to consider what that portrait could mean for various audiences, including, as we describe below, that of the student. We recognize that different sets of student writing will produce distinct composite maps, thus raising potentially contrastive areas for analysis.

Nonetheless, individual case studies do have epistemological value, particularly in social sciences and in studies of human learning. Case studies prove particularly "important for the development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behavior cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest levels of the learning process and in much theory" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223). Just as context, intimate knowledge, and experience are at the center of a teaching activity, says Flyvbjerg, so too are they at the center of a case study (p. 222). Thus, we offer this case study as one appropriate and valuable approach; we see the nuances of how student writers experience struggle through the lens of Leanne.

Mapping Leanne's writing, in particular, led us to consider the role that identity might play in crossing thresholds. Given that our research question focused on what could arise from student writing without the context of the classroom, it is worth noting that although one of the authors taught Leanne, she did not share information about her during our research process. As a research group, we read her writing without knowing its value in a grade or ways Leanne approached writing, coursework, other students, or the instructor within the classroom context; she was essentially anonymous. Through the process of mapping Leanne's writing, however, she emerged for each of us as three-dimensional; we could imagine her in our own classrooms with histories, concerns, strengths, and weaknesses.

Although Leanne shares relatively little in the pieces that we read for this project, in her most revealing piece,

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

she exposes her current struggle as a first-year college student. Overworked, exhausted, and unable to focus on school, in her letter to her mother, Leanne does not sound like a student who has academic confidence or the financial means to gain that confidence. In fact, Leanne seems to be struggling with a role—the college student. Quite literally, she is stuck in liminal space: she doesn't live on campus, she has to commute a sizable distance to learn, and she then leaves campus to work. She recognizes that she is falling behind in school because she works too much, yet she also says how important school is to her. Leanne is stuck, oscillating between two demanding positions and recognizing that it is unsustainable. We wonder if Leanne never fully reaches a point in this letter because the point itself is not fully speakable (or knowable): asking for money? Laying the groundwork for dropping out of school? For the scope of this article, we include this speculation in order to juxtapose the identities that emerge from these bodies of writing and to consider the role that identity construction might play in students' processes of grasping and integrating multiple threshold concepts.

Though we acknowledge what writers can become through acts of writing and learning to write, what this case study brought to our attention is the idea that *previous* identity formation is particularly important when encountering threshold concepts: certain identities might obscure threshold concepts, such as Leanne's sense of herself as a student who "should" write a certain way; others, perhaps unexpected, might open up a defining sense of liminality—such as Leanne's struggle to reconcile work, home, and school—guiding a student towards a threshold but making it more difficult for a writer to move beyond that liminal space (Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010).

The Utility of Mapping

Ultimately mapping student writing on the axes allowed us to conceive of struggle as both process and product and to understand more about how students move through struggle across time in ways that student reflections or assessment tools like grades or rubrics don't always illustrate. The map also allowed us to value the process of oscillation by identifying specific points at which struggle might begin as pedagogical opportunities. Although investigating all of those opportunities

is beyond the scope of this article, here we offer some pedagogical directions inspired by this research.

One potential primary audience for these maps are students themselves. Because our original intention was simply to determine how we might identify threshold concepts in student writing and what that process might reveal to us as teachers of first year writers, we did not conceive of students as an audience for these maps. That said, the graphic representation of reflection and application has potential for allowing student writers to "see" both growth and potential for growth. For example, having students explain an individual composite map by reflecting on the different types of difficulty and opportunity each writing situation presented to them, which would position recognition of difficulty as a first step for students writing the assignment, would provide a productive alternative to a final reflective letter.

The potential impact of visual representation of their writing makes most sense when placed in a composition classroom already grounded in discussions of difficulty, in practices around noticing and investigating difficulty, and in models of how difficulty pushes us to do more with language as both readers and writers. Carillo's (2017) difficulty inventory, which essentially asks readers to notice and name difficulties as well as brainstorm potential resources to address them, provides one model for privileging students' recognition of difficulty, a habit of mind that using the individual map could help students continue to develop. Building on metacognitive instructional practices such as these, this threshold concept mapping strategy would push students to consider relationships between their thinking about a writing concept (or metacognition, which we equate here with process) and with their application of the concept (or the rhetorical moves in their writing, which we equate more with product). With this use in mind, we also see opportunity in having students use the axes to engage in mapping their own writing. For example, the axes provide a visual that can engage students in the relationship between thinking about a writing project—in all the forms that thinking may take, such as in stages of planning, rereading, brainstorming, etc.—and the actual writing of that project. We wonder how considering time spent on demonstrating ideas and thinking about ideas for a project might reinforce the value of metacognition and reflection during various stages of the writing process.

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

We can see potential use in having students share and explain these maps with their peers.

Furthermore, we can imagine engaging students in acts of analysis similar to those that led us to this map. For example, our analysis is a discursive one, and engaging students in identifying and interpreting the discourse of reflection or metacognition, both in their own writing and in a mentor text, could help make these discourses—and the thoughts they generate—more visible for students. Using metacognitive mentor texts to help students notice useful syntactic structures is one possible way to engage them in the production of these maps.

Beyond the pedagogical use for students and its use as a research instrument, we see utility in the map as a generative tool for teachers as well. For instance, we think there is potential worth in plotting student work on axes in how it can change instructor perception of students' willingness to participate in disciplinary conversations, given that in first-year courses, many of us encounter students who are adjusting to the expectations of college while holding onto their prior learning experiences and knowledge. Much in the way that Porter et al (2000) used techniques from postmodern cultural geographers to map spaces that offer "potential for the interrogation of resistance and agency" (p. 620), we see our threshold plane as a way to do something similar: to analyze the way students may or may not participate, engage, or do work in the ways we expect. Importantly, the axes can complicate instructors' understanding of students' struggles to apply or reflect on knowledge, so that we are, perhaps, more aware of the role of oscillation in learning and less likely to view students as lazy or unmotivated.

Mapping threshold concepts is also useful in the way Sullivan and Porter (1997) have described postmodern mapping, not in a modernist way that "represents information about an existing and static reality" but as "heuristic" (p. 79), depicting what research "allows, what it blocks, what else might be pictured, how it freezes time, and how it allows time to escape" (p. 80). We may have "blocked" other pieces of writing by this student or other threshold concepts that certainly would have created different understandings of her as a writer. And while we "froze time," pinning each piece of writing like a dart affixed to its place on the board, there are many ways the board could be expanded or altered with more points, connections, and relationships (e.g., pieces of writing, threshold concepts examined), testifying to the openness Sullivan and Porter would seek in a map like this.

While we looked at one threshold concept in our discipline, our map allows for an educator in any discipline to look at any number of concepts and any student product. The value in this mapping lies in being able to reveal student oscillation and growth, however slight. Seeing even modest movements in the liminal space is informative, even if the student doesn't cross a threshold. For example, a writer like Leanne may have earned the same grade on each of these three projects, a measurement that would obscure the movement that we saw in the map. As instructors of any discipline, appreciating the reality of oscillation in learning is often not easy to do. Essentially, this study reinforced how capacious the liminal space is; simply approaching the threshold in a semester is part of learning, even if a student doesn't cross it within that time frame. We therefore recognize a need for future longitudinal studies that explore how students encounter troublesome knowledge over longer periods of time, perhaps using an instrument like the Threshold Concept Map to identify subtle oscillations. As teachers, we guide students towards thresholds while trying to foster their willingness to struggle, so it is imperative that we can envision what the complexity of that struggle looks like.

The Threshold Concept Map *continued*

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PROGRAM REPORTS

Better Together? Sense of Community in a Pre-Service Teacher Cohort Model
—Kristen Ferguson and Natalya Brown

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Abstract

In this paper, the impact of a section (cohort) model on the sense of community of students enrolled in a one-year Bachelor of Education program in Ontario, Canada is explored. 290 students completed an online survey that used a modified version of the Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale (Lounsbury & De-Neui, 1996) with additional questions about sections at Nipissing University. Students report a positive impact of the section model in creating a sense of community. Moreover, when compared to their peers who are not organized in sections, sectioned education students report an overall higher level of sense of community and score higher on all four dimensions of sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). A high sense of community is associated with a positive experience of belonging as well as positive feelings about university recruitment and alumni donations.

Keywords

cohorts, pre-service education cohorts, higher education sense of community, pre-service teacher organization.

Better Together? Sense of Community in a Pre-Service Teacher Cohort Model

"My undergrad program did not give me a sense of community. Nipissing was such a great experience for me largely because of the section organization. I made lasting connections and friendships with some of the best people I had ever met. I loved feeling like I was part of a unit and my section helped me through the challenges of the program."

A cohort, students working collaboratively together as a group or unit, is a common organizational structure in many professional post-secondary programs. In teacher education, cohorts are a touted feature of many programs (Eiffler & Potthof, 1998; Goodlad, 1994; Norris & Barnett, 1994) and are often used to socialize pre-service teachers to professional skills, such as teamwork and collaboration (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006). Cohorts may also serve as a social support network for pre-service teachers, thus impacting teacher self-efficacy (Meristo, Ljalikova, & Löfrström, 2013). The cohort structure is also supported by learning theories such as cooperative learning theory (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998), situated learning and communities of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1990). In addition, cohorts have a number of practical benefits such as ease of timetabling classes and accommodating cooperative learning assignments, which are common in pre-service education (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003).

Better Together? *continued*

Cohorts in Education at Nipissing University

Prior to 2015, education students enrolled in Nipissing University in Ontario, Canada, in the consecutive Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, would complete a one-year degree after completing a three or four year undergraduate degree, thus called a consecutive education degree. One longstanding tradition in Nipissing University's consecutive education program was the idea of "sections": cohorts of approximately 35-40 students who complete all required classes for the program as a group. Unlike some types of pre-service cohort models, the cohort model at Nipissing University did not extend into teaching practicum (also known as student teaching or practice teaching) in any way. The cohort model was only for classes on campus. The cohort model for consecutive students was in contrast to Nipissing University's concurrent education program that allowed students some flexibility to select their courses. Concurrent education students took a combination of undergraduate courses and education courses in each year of study, and graduated after five years.

In 2015, the Ontario provincial government mandated that B.Ed programs be two-year programs. In the new two-year B.Ed. program beginning in the fall of 2015, consecutive B.Ed. students at Nipissing University were no longer organized in cohorts but instead signed up for classes. Because of the relatively small size of the program, many students have several classes together, but they are not in specific cohorts as previous students have been.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the benefits and drawbacks of the traditional cohort model in Nipissing University's B.Ed. program, specifically to see if the model created a sense of community among students. This study also investigates the opinions of students and alumni of the one-year program about maintaining the cohort model in the new two-year program. Thus the research questions guiding this study are:

1. Did Nipissing University's Bachelor of Education section model create a sense of community among students? If so, how?

2. What were the benefits and drawbacks of the section model for students?

3. Should the cohort model be kept in the new two-year Bachelor of Education at Nipissing University? Why or why not?

While other studies have examined elements of sense of community within their research, this is the first study that specifically uses the psychological construct to measure the sense of community in pre-service education cohorts. In addition, while this study focuses on cohorts and education students, this study is relevant for any discipline considering a student cohort model.

Sense of Community

The literature reveals that it is worthwhile for colleges and universities to foster a sense of community among students. A sense of community among post-secondary students is positively related to:

- students' intention to stay at an institution (Jacobs & Archie 2008)

- first-year student completion (Tinto, 2012)

- a sense of commitment to the university (Tinto, 1993, 2012)

- degree completion Harris (2006-2007)

- levels of burnout among students (McCarthy, Pretty, & Cantano, 1990)

- whether students feel their tuition dollars spent were worthwhile (Conn, 2017)

- agreement with the university's mission statement (Torres-Harding, Diaz, Schamberger, & Carollo, 2015).

The sense of community (referred to hereafter as SoC) theory developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) provides a framework for studying the possible group cohesion in a cohort model of teacher education. McMillan and Chavis (1986) state a sense of community "is

Better Together? *continued*

a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). There are four elements necessary to have a SoC: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It is postulated that the cohort/section model can meet all four elements of sense of community (see Figure 1).

Cohorts in Pre-Service Education: Reviewing the Literature

A cohort is a group of students who take classes as a unit, and thereby share academic and social experiences together. Ohana (2000) outlines three types of cohort models in pre-service education: a *closed cohort* takes all courses together with no new members admitted after the group is formed; an *open cohort* takes core classes together but other classes may be taken independently and no new group members are admitted; in a *fluid cohort*, students can leave or join the group at different times (Ohana, 2000). Pre-service education cohorts can also be formed around a specific theme; for instance, in one Ontario university, there are pre-service cohorts

for teaching in multilingual classrooms, gifted students, diversity, inclusion and global community connections (Daniel, 2009). Other cohort programs also have students complete teaching practicum placements with members of their cohorts (Clarke, Erickson, Collins & Phelan, 2005). Cohorts often have a distinctive quality, and a cohort feeling cannot be duplicated one year to the next (Clarke, Erickson, Collins & Phelan, 2005).

While the cohort model may be relatively common in pre-service education and the notion conjures up images of cooperative, professional learning groups, a review of the literature on cohorts paints a broad picture of cohorts for pre-service teachers. Below, key studies in the extant literature are outlined, including both the wholly positive and extremely negative findings of cohorts in pre-service education, with particular emphasis on sense of community within the cohorts. Because of the mixed nature of the findings (both positive and negative for the cohort model) even within the studies of one cohort program, the extant literature is presented chronologically for clarity.

In their study of pre-service teachers in a university in the southeastern US, Radencich et al. (1998) finds that

Influence: the trust created from membership may give students a safe space to influence and be influenced by each other. Everyone can have a voice in the section.

Integration and fulfillment of needs: membership and belonging to the section is beneficial and rewarding for students academically, socially, and emotionally.

Membership: students are assigned a group. They spend a significant amount of time being with and working with the same group of individuals, thereby creating social and emotional ties and a feeling of belonging.

Shared emotional connection: through shared experiences of classes, assignments, and social events, cohorts experience a common history and identity as a group.
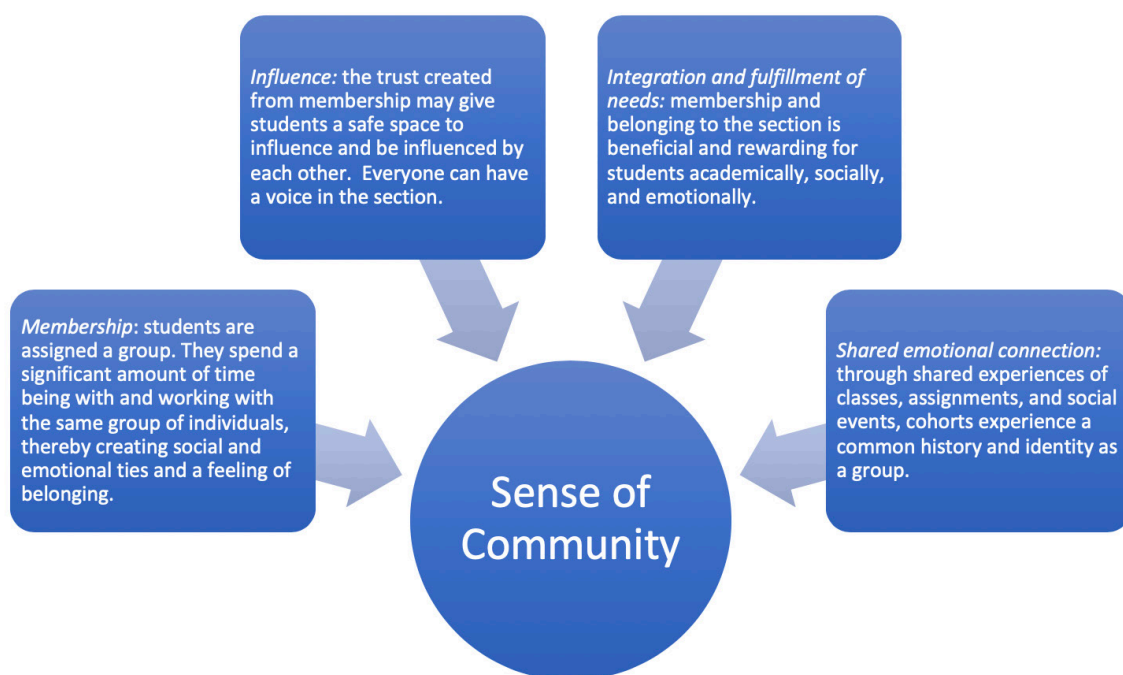
Sense of Community

Figure 1. Proposed dimensions of Sense of Community based on McMillan and Chavis (1986)

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cohorts are "almost bimodal, on the whole either very positive or almost pathological" (p. 112). While cohorts can create a sense of family, they can also create a sense of otherness, create cliques, foster negative group pressure, and encourage scapegoating or blaming professors (Radencich et al., 1998). Radencich et al. (1998) find that some experiences can be both positive and negative in the cohort model, such that they impact on academic performance; while cohorts provide students with academic support and healthy competition for grades, professors reported lower achievement in cohort classes compared to non-cohort classes.

Mather and Hanley (1999) report the findings of their study of cohorts of pre-service elementary teachers at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. The positive reasons students want to remain in a cohort model include: emotional and academic support, friendship-making, and work ethic from the cohort. Reasons for not wanting to be in a cohort include: too much time together, competition, and group dynamics. In addition, Mather and Hanley (1999) find that members of the cohorts also report a type of mob-mentality and a ganging up on professors. Interestingly, no students in the control group (who are not a part of a cohort), report feelings of isolation in their education program (Mather & Hanley, 1999).

Connor and Killmer's (2000) study investigates whether pre-service teachers in cohorts are more successful than traditionally prepared pre-service teachers in Iowa. They surveyed both groups of teacher candidates as well as school cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Cohort students perceive higher in values (such as professional behaviours, holistic understanding, instructional ability, and applications of knowledge) in themselves than do non-cohort pre-service teachers. The university supervisors and cooperating teachers also rate cohort students higher than non-cohort student in these values (Connor & Killmer, 2000).

Ohana's (2000) study of three US universities' math and science pre-service cohorts finds that the use of cohorts in pre-service education develops a sense of community and confidence in students. In contrast to Connor and Killmer (2000), Ohana (2000) reports that cliques form, and cliques can become critical of faculty members, resulting in negative professor perceptions and evaluations. Cohorts also create a pressure to conform because individuals may not want to voice personal opinions (Ohana, 2000). Cohorts can also create a sense of "elitism" according to faculty members, meaning that cohorts feel so empowered that they "developed a sense of arrogance and demanded special treatment or consideration" (Ohana, 2000, p. 18). Faculty members can be outsiders with "little effect on group norms" (Ohana, 2000, p. 27).

Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott's (2001) study of a cohort of special education pre-service teachers in the US reports that cohort experiences can be powerfully positive or negative, and the personalities and student characteristics within the cohorts impact the overall sense of trust and community. They find that men and those with strong personalities dominated the cohorts, while students from minority groups may be less comfortable (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001).

In their small study, Lucas and Robinson (2002) state that a cohort organization of freshmen undergraduates considering teaching in New Jersey builds a sense of community, increases the confidence of students, and socializes students to the teaching profession. While Lucas and Robinson (2002) did not use a formal scale to measure SoC nor did they give a specific definition of SoC, they report that SoC was "by far the most prominent theme in students' comments" (p. 6). For example, 88% of students agreed or strongly agreed, "I felt I was a part of something special" (8). Lucas and Robinson (2002) also find the cohort model to be an effective way to attract and maintain students of colour in education programs.

Mandzuk, Hasinoff, and Seifert's (2003) study states that the teacher education cohort model at the University of Manitoba creates deep relationships and trust for pre-service teachers. However, part-time students, mature students, and students who are weaker academically may not have as positive experiences in their cohorts. Mandzuk, Hasinoff, and Seifert (2003) also report that the cohort model can be positive in that they are supportive structures but can be negative as cohorts may "go bad" (p. 170). Too much time together can be stifling and can lead to group think and conformity; dominating personalities can overtake the cohort; and rivalries can develop between cohorts (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003).

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Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, and Bondy (2006) report about cohorts in a pre-service special education program in Florida. The authors make five recommendations for students in pre-service teacher cohorts: keep an academic focus, pull your own weight, take care of the community, be willing to move outside your comfort zone, and include everyone. Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, and Bondy (2006) present three subcategories of taking care of the community: communicating concern about other members, conveying respect, and seeking instructor help when necessary. They also find that the two main benefits for students of cohorts are academic support and psychological support (Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006).

Dinsmore and Wenger (2006) state in their study of a small pre-service education cohort in Oregon, "all was not perfect in paradise" (p. 68) and report that cliques can exclude individuals in cohorts. Despite the drawbacks, Dinsmore and Wenger (2006) find that as new teachers, cohort graduates try to re-create the SoC in their classrooms that they experienced as student teachers. As one first-year teacher explains, "Building a strong community is so important. I know that the positive relationships that were established throughout my teacher ed program helped me become the teacher that I am today" (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006, p. 72).

Seifert and Mandzuk (2006) deduce that cohorts spend too much time together and this tends to encourage a sense of "mass hysteria," often around trivial matters (p. 1310). Seifert and Mandzuk (2006) also find that cohort members value the social and emotional supports from their peers more than the academic support or intellectual challenge. While Seifert & Mandzuk (2006) do not state where the study was conducted and instead use pseudonyms, they report that age, family responsibilities, religious differences, and geographic distance from campus can impact students' attachment to their cohort.

In sum, reviewing the literature reveals positive and negative impacts of cohorts in pre-service education at various institutions. It remains, however, unclear as to whether the cohort model is indeed an ideal organization model for pre-service teachers. In addition, while SoC in cohorts was addressed briefly by Dinsmore and Wenger (2006), Lucas and Robinson (2002), and Ohana (2000), no studies in the literature search explore SoC in pre-ser-

vice education cohorts using a psychological construct. This study fills a void in the literature by explicitly exploring SoC and pre-service education cohorts.

Method

The survey instrument includes items modified from the 14-item Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale (CPSCS) (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996, see Table 1). Responses for each item are structured on a

ITEM
I really felt like I belonged in the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University.
There was a social atmosphere on campus.
I wish I had gone to another B.Ed. program instead of this one.
Students felt they could get help if they are in trouble.
I would recommend the Nipissing University B.Ed. program to my friends.
My parents liked Nipissing University B.Ed. program.
There was a strong feeling of togetherness on campus.
I someday plan to give alumni contributions to Nipissing University.
I really enjoyed going to Nipissing University for my B.Ed.
B.Ed. students at Nipissing University really care about what happens to the university.
I feel very attached to the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University.
Campus life was very stimulating
If I were going to do my B.Ed. again, I would go here.
There is a real sense of community within the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University.

Table 1: Modified Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale Items

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five-point Likert scale. In addition, the modified CP-SCS measures the four dimensions of SoC as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) – membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. In addition to the CPSCS score, we created scores for each dimension of SoC, and used the average of the dimensional scores to create a composite SoC score.

Along with the modified CPSCS, the instrument also includes additional questions about cohorts at Nipissing University. These questions are five-point Likert scale items and open-ended questions. For example, consecutive (sectioned/cohorted) students are asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "The organization of the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University into sections is an important part of the Nipissing University B.Ed. experience," while concurrent (non-sectioned/non-cohorted) students are asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "I felt a real sense of community as a member of my yearly cohort in the concurrent B.Ed. program at Nipissing University." Both groups are asked what they would change about the organization of their respective programs. Finally, the survey concludes with demographic questions.

Nipissing University's ethics board approved a link to a voluntary online survey hosted on Fluid Surveys on Nipissing University's Teachers' Facebook group. This Facebook group consists primarily of current and past students of Nipissing University's education programs and also some faculty members and teaching recruiters; at the time of the data collection in May 2015, there were 3130 members. Overall, 290 participants completed the survey of which 40 identified as concurrent students (non-sectioned), 223 identified as consecutive students (sectioned), and 27 did not indicate a response. These sample proportions are similar to the population of education students at Nipissing University. Prior to the two-year B.Ed. program, the university annually graduated approximately 900 students in its one-year consecutive B.Ed. program and 100 students from its concurrent B.Ed. program on its main campus. Therefore, the concurrent students are not underrepresented in the sample. The majority of participants indicate that they were either in the Primary/Junior (P/J, Kindergarten to Grade 6, 35.2%) or Junior/Intermediate divisions (J/I, Grades 4 to 10, 37.9%), with only 15.2% indicating

that they were in the Intermediate/Senior division (I/S, Grades 7 to 10). These proportions are also consistent with enrolment in the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University. The majority of participants are female (86.3%) and lived off the university campus during their course of study (79.1%).

SPSS v.24 was used for the statistical analysis of the quantitative survey data. Both researchers initially analyzed the qualitative data separately using a constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009). Independently, the researchers read the data, compared data among respondents, and identified patterns and themes that emerged for each qualitative question; each researcher ultimately developed a set of codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To increase the reliability of the analysis, the researchers then met to discuss, modify, and agree on the themes, patterns, and codes (Patton, 1990). The qualitative data were then re-read and sorted using the agreed upon codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The generalizability of the results of this study is limited by the fact that the data is derived from one sample taken at a single university with a specific cohort organizational model. It is also plausible that the members of the Nipissing University's Teacher Facebook group are more likely to have had a positive experience at the university or joined the group in order to maintain the SoC they experienced during their program of study. Therefore, there is a possibility of selection bias.

Results

Quantitative Results for Sense of Community

In terms of scale reliability, Cronbach's alpha for the CPSCS in this study is 0.888, well above the generally accepted 0.7 cut-off (Kline, 2000). Overall, participants in the study indicate that there was a positive SoC within the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University. The means of the CPSCS score and composite SoC score both indicate this. The dimensions with the highest scores are membership and integration and fulfillment of needs, followed by shared emotional connection. Influence has the lowest mean score of the four dimensions. Table 2 provides the item, dimension, and scale mean scores for the concurrent and consecutive B.Ed. programs.

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ITEM/DIMENSION/SCALE	MEAN ALL PARTICIPANTS (STD. DEV.)	MEAN CONCURRENT PROGRAM (STD. DEV.)	MEAN CONSECUTIVE PROGRAM (STD. DEV.)	SIG. OF MEAN DIFFERENCE
There is a real sense of community within the B.Ed. Program at Nipissing University	4.020 (1.087)	3.380 (1.227)	4.140 (1.025)	0.001
CPSCS score	3.762 (0.615)	3.477 (0.796)	3.812 (0.567)	0.002
Composite SoC	3.920 (0.772)	3.581 (0.973)	3.981 (0.719)	0.003
Membership	4.039 (0.949)	3.667 (1.132)	4.103 (0.901)	0.008
Influence	3.667 (0.908)	3.282 (1.111)	3.739 (0.853)	0.004
Integration and Fulfillment of Needs	3.975 (0.696)	3.719 (0.902)	4.020 (0.648)	0.056
Shared Emotional Connection	3.949 (0.917)	3.577 (1.073)	4.039 (0.853)	0.003
I felt a real sense of community as a member of my yearly cohort in the concurrent B.Ed. program at Nipissing University		3.920 (1.233)		
I enjoyed being a member of a section in the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University			4.310 (1.021)	
The organization of the B.Ed. program into sections is an important part of the Nipissing University B.Ed. experience			4.190 (1.069)	

Table 2: Item, Dimension, and Scale Mean Scores for Sense of Community by Program

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The mean response of concurrent education respondents to the item, "I felt a real sense of community as a member of my yearly cohort" indicates that they mostly agreed with this statement. The majority of these participants (67.5%) also indicate that they would not have preferred to be organized into sections similar to their consecutive program counterparts. Throughout, t-tests were used to test for differences in sample means. Despite concurrent education students being together at Nipissing University for five years, participants from the 1-year consecutive education program (that were in cohorts/sections) have statistically significantly higher scores for SoC ($p < 0.01$). In addition, the CPSCS and composite SoC scores are also significantly higher for participants in the consecutive program ($p < 0.01$). With a mean composite SoC score of 3.581 and CPSCS score of 3.477, participants from the concurrent program indicate that they felt some sense of community within the university. Meanwhile, a mean composite SoC score of 3.981 and CPSCS score of 3.812 for participants in the consecutive program indicates that they felt more of a sense of community during their time at the university. Forty-six percent of participants from the concurrent program agree or strongly agree with the statement "There is a real sense of community in the B.Ed. program at Nipissing University," compared to 81% of participants in the consecutive program.

For individual dimensions of SoC, consecutive program participants have statistically significantly higher scores for all four dimensions. The greatest absolute difference is in the shared emotional connection dimension, with participants in the consecutive program having a 12.9% higher average score in comparison to participants from the concurrent program ($p < 0.05$). Fifty-six percent of participants in the concurrent program scored a 4 or higher out of 5 on the shared emotional connection dimension compared to 72.5% of those in the consecutive program. The influence dimension has the highest percentage difference with consecutive program participants having a 13.9% higher average score than concurrent program participants ($p < 0.05$). Thirty-eight percent of participants in the concurrent program scored a 4 or higher out of 5 on the influence dimension compared to 50.5% of those in the consecutive program. Consecutive program participants are also more likely to feel that they belonged in or were attached to the B.Ed. program at the university, that there was a

strong sense of togetherness on campus, and that they enjoyed the program. Fifty-nine percent of participants in the concurrent program agree or strongly agree with the statement "There is strong feeling of togetherness on campus" compared to 74.7% of those from the consecutive program.

In terms of program division, there are no statistically significant differences in the scoring for real sense of community, composite SoC, the CPSCS, and across the four dimensions of SoC between Primary/Junior and Junior/Intermediate divisions. However, participants in the Primary/Junior division have statistically significantly higher scores for real sense of community, the CPSCS, and the membership dimension than those in the Intermediate/Senior division ($p < 0.05$). Participants in the Junior/Intermediate divisions also have statistically significantly higher scores for the CPSCS and the membership dimension than those in the Intermediate/Senior division ($p < 0.05$).

A factor analysis on the 14-item CPSCS reveals that the item with the strongest association to SoC is "I really enjoyed going to Nipissing for my B.Ed." with a factor loading of 0.871. All other variables are strongly associated with this factor and this is the only factor with at least three variables with loadings above 0.4. Therefore, this item stand-in for SoC is used in an ordinal regression with program, division, residence and gender as independent variables. The complementary log-log function is appropriate, as the probability of the higher category is high. The results are consistent with the study's other findings. That is, being in the concurrent program reduces the odds of being in the higher SoC category, when other predictors are held constant. Similarly, Primary/Junior and Junior/Intermediate division participants have a greater probability of being in the higher SoC category over intermediate/Senior division participants. Finally, gender or whether students lived on or off campus has no impact on SoC.

Sense of community also has strong implications for student satisfaction. The CPSCS has three items indicating student satisfaction: (1) I would recommend the Nipissing University B.Ed. program to my friends, (2) I someday plan to give alumni contributions to Nipissing University, and (3) If I were to do my B.Ed. again, I would go here. Analyzing the association between SoC

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and student satisfaction measures required the transformation of the real sense of community variable (the last item in the CPSCS scale) into a binary variable indicating either high SoC or low SoC. Somers' *d* indicated an association between each measure of student satisfaction and SoC amongst 260 participants. Students with high SoC are more likely to indicate that they would recommend this program to friends ($d = .610$, $p < .001$). Also, students with high SoC are more likely to indicate that if they were to do their B.Ed. again, they would choose to go to Nipissing University ($d = .736$, $p < .001$). Finally, participants with higher SoC scores are also more likely to indicate that they planned to give alumni contributions to Nipissing University ($d = .348$, $p < .001$). A visual summary of the key quantitative findings is presented in Figure 2.

Qualitative Results for Perspectives of the Cohort Model

On the following page, the qualitative results about the benefits, drawbacks, and suggestions for the cohort model as well as perceptions about using cohorts in the new two-year program are outlined. See Figure 3 on the following page for a summary of the results.

Benefits of Sections. Current and former consecutive education students answered the open-ended question, "What are the benefits of Nipissing's B.Ed. program being organized into sections?" Six themes emerge as perceived benefits from the cohort model. The first theme is *sense of community*. One participant states, "I felt there was a community I could rely on and talk to about my experiences at school," while another states, "I had the opportunity to be part of a very tight community of 40 other people in the same situation as I was in." Many participants feel that sections felt like family. For example, one participant reflects that:

> Being organized into sections created a "family" in a sense. Going through the B.Ed. program for some was the next big step in their life, and having people around you going through the same thing make the experience more comfortable and enjoyable.

The second theme that emerges is *friendship making*. One participant writes, "having a section allowed me to make 44 life-long friends and connections in education. I wouldn't have had the same experience if the program was not organized the way it was."
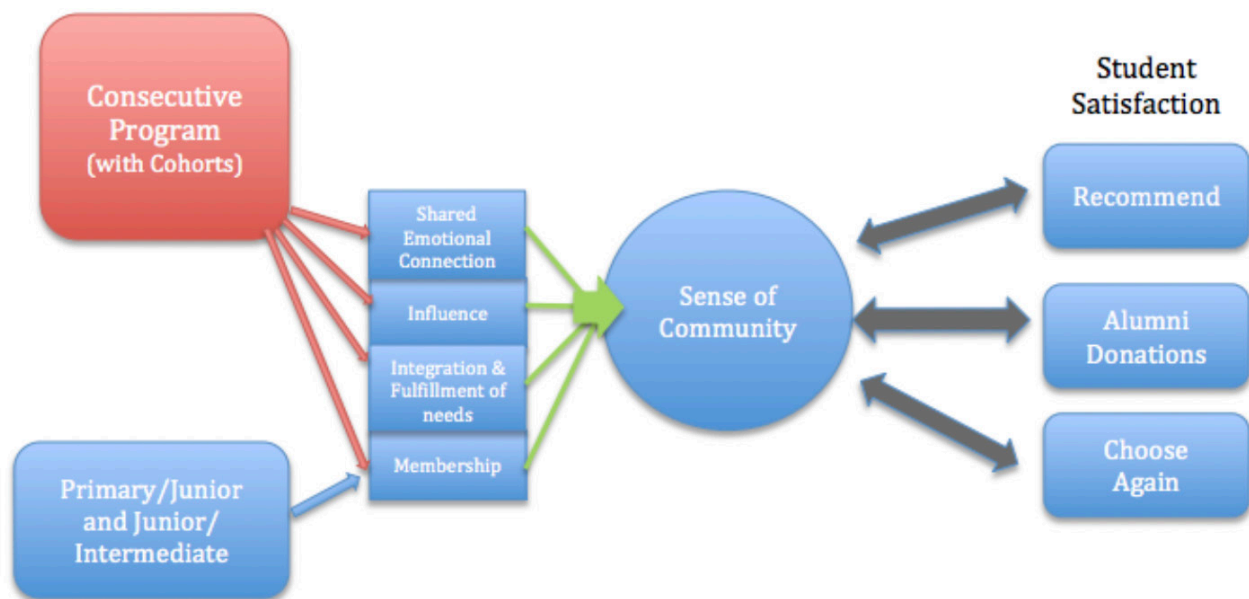

Figure 2. Consecutive program and division positively impact dimensions of sense of community; sense of community is positively associated with intentions to recommend the program to others, to make alumni donations, and choosing the program again.

Better Together? *continued*

Benefits
Sense of Community

Friendship making

Support

Safe Space

Realistic Simulation

Scheduling

Drawbacks
Limited opportunities
Too much time together

Stuck in a bad section

Conflict

Cliques

Too much group work

Competition

Suggestions for Cohorts

More choice

Mix up cohorts

More social events

Team building

Smaller cohorts

Cohorts in the Two- Year B.Ed?

Yes

Benefits listed above

Distinguishing Feature of Nipissing University

No

Drawbacks listed above

Two years is too long to be in same cohort
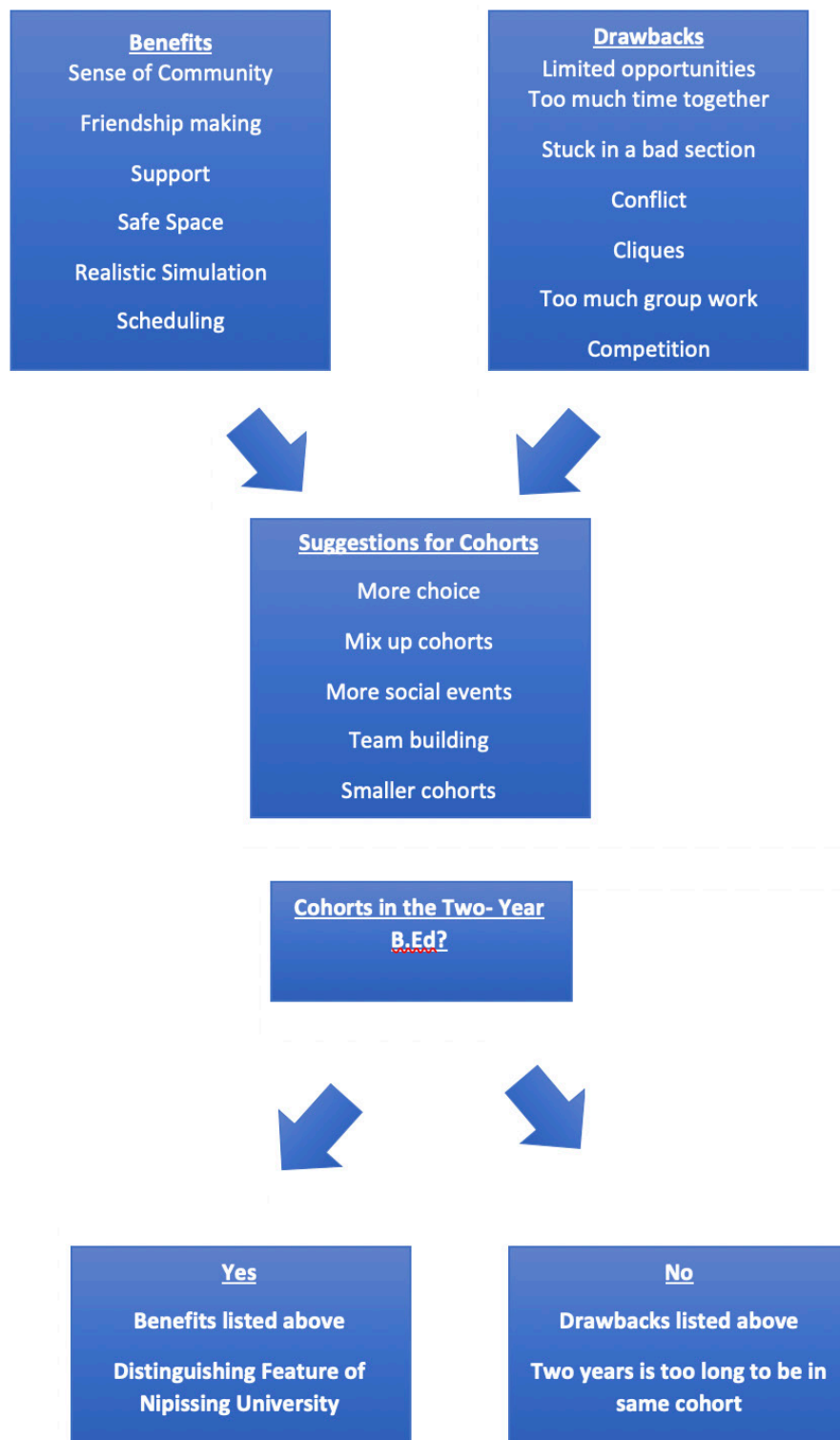
Figure 3. Benefits and drawbacks of the cohort model, suggestions for cohorts in pre-service teacher education, and suggestions for cohorts in the two-year B.Ed. program.

Better Together? *continued*

Participants also mention the speed that friendships are made. One participant finds having an "automatic peer group at a new school/city" is beneficial while another states that the section organization "brings groups of people close together in a short amount of time." For participants, these friendships endure past graduation; as one participant explains, "sections gave you the opportunity to form lifelong bonds with sections mates."

Support – academic, emotional, and social – is the third theme that emerged from the participants' comments about the benefits of sections. As one participant states, "These teachers become your first line of support during and after your time at Nipissing." Another participant refers to section mates as "the rocks that helped you get through a very hectic year." The same participant also writes:

> I could and still can easily turn to my section-mates for help with issues and ideas for the classroom. You had people who understood exactly what you were going through and could support each other and let off steam together.

Support also did not end upon graduation; participants found "great support throughout the program and after" and "I have a built in network of teachers that I can now tap into."

The sections also create a *safe space* for participants. As one participant explains, "you get very comfortable with your section, able to make fools of yourself and not worry about anything except growing as an educator with others making the same journey." This safe space appears to be a result of the relatively small size of the cohorts; for example, one student writes, "Smaller groups, more sense of community amongst a smaller group, ability to get to know and develop a close relationship to your professors, more opportunities for meaningful dialogue/inquiry."

Participants also find that the cohort model creates a *realistic simulation of their future professional environment*. One participant writes, "A major component of being a successful educator in today's school system is teamwork. Being a member of a section developed my skills as a collaborative educator." Another participant believes the section organization "mimics [the] dynamic of a classroom that you will be teaching."

Cohorts also provide convenience in terms of *scheduling* according to participants. One participant writes, "With the amount of group work that occurs in this degree program, being able to have the same class schedules makes it tremendously easy to schedule time to work together." Another notes, "It makes planning group work, social events and getting help so much easier when everyone has the same schedule."

Drawbacks of Sections. Current and former consecutive education students also answered the open-ended question, "What are the drawbacks of Nipissing's B.Ed. program being organized into sections?" Responses are clustered into 10 distinct themes. The first theme is that the section organization *limited opportunities to meet others* outside of the section. One participant states that "sections limited interactions with people," and another that, "It would be nice to have met even more people, which may have been possible if the program was not organized into sections."

Participants also indicate *too much time together* as another negative of cohorts. For instance, one participant writes, "when you spend that much time with the same people, it is more likely that there will be confrontation," while another states, "You're always with the same people, there is no change, and you all are sick of each other by the time you come back from your last placement."

Participants are also concerned about being *stuck in a bad section*; one participant says, "You're stuck with the same stupid and stuck up people all year long." Another participant reflects, "If you don't get a good section it's not great at all. Plus you don't get to meet as many people because you are stuck with your section … it can either be a fabulous idea or dreadful."

Conflict emerges as a fourth theme from the responses. One participant states, "I found the B.Ed. program to be very dramatic and catty. Having to do so much group work and always working with the same people was trying. It can be very cutthroat." Another participant notes, "Sometimes there are interpersonal conflicts among section members that cannot get resolved and these conflicts affect the entire section."

Along the same vein, participants note the presence of *cliques*. For instance, one participant writes, "I found my section to be very 'cliquey' which resulted in much

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isolation, bullying, and by the end of the year depression and social anxiety," while another explained,

> I found that it almost simulated a high school experience where you had the "mean girls" the "jocks" the "losers" and the "not really cool but not quite a loser" groups. As adults training to be teachers I would have thought people would have been concentrating on their training rather than playing high school games. This was quite disappointing. I also witnessed quite a bit of bullying within the sections.

While cohorts ease the scheduling of group work, participants also feel there is *too much group work*. One participant explains, "There's the rare case where someone doesn't click with anyone from their section and then they're basically screwed for every group project (of which there are many) for the year," while another states, "Near the end and before big breaks, everyone starts to get sick of each other, I think because there's so much group work. [It] Would be better if there was a bit more independent work as well."

Competition between sections also appears as a theme. One participant writes "competition that becomes unhealthy" while another explains that it "felt like being friends with students outside of your section was 'weird' and everything felt like a competition."

Some participants are concerned with professors *labeling sections*:

> Profs seemed to pick "favourite" sections and then treat those sections based on their like or dislike of the members of the section. Sections were often labeled "bad" or "good" by profs. This created a stigma within the section and within the B.Ed. program in general, as profs would often talk about other sections with other sections.

Another participant feels that the section organization "creates 'names' for sections: PJ 2 is a party group, PJ 5 is the lazy group. This involves generalizations [that] don't hold true for everyone in the class."

A few participants raise the issue of cohorts exerting *pressure on professors*. For example, one participant ob-

serves "an oppositional group-instructor dynamic" while another claims that the cohort model "encourages sections to develop expectations of their instructors across courses, eroding the academic rigor of the program but limiting instructors' abilities to hold high expectations for their students' work."

Finally, a significant number of participants state that there are *no drawbacks* to sections. For example, "I don't feel there were any drawbacks," while another writes there was enough interaction between sections stating, "In my mind, nothing. Even sections got to know other sections due to intramurals, formal, residence, and elective courses."

Suggested Changes to Section Model. Current and former consecutive education students also answered the question, "What would you change about Nipissing's B.Ed. sections?" Some respondents state that they would change nothing about the section model: "nothing –they work wonderfully." However, most respondents have suggestions for the B.Ed. program section model, and seven themes emerge as suggested changes.

First, participants suggest a number of changes for cohorts that involve *choice*. Some participants like the idea of having electives, where students can pick a class based on interest. One respondent suggests, have "one or more optional or elective classes offered based on personal, professional interests." Other participants want to sign up for courses individually; as one student says, "let me pick my timetable and take classes that suit my life, not my section."

Other participants suggest the idea of sometimes being in a cohort but *mixing up cohorts* at other times. For example, certain "core classes" could be in cohorts but then mixing the students for other classes: "core classes with your section and mixed classes for subjects and teachables." Another common suggestion is changing sections half way through the new two-year program: "because it is now a two-year program, I would change up the sections in the second year."

Many participants also suggest that the university *plan more social events* that force students to mingle with one another. One participant explains, "adding B.Ed. mixers would help develop more of a sense of commu-

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nity amongst all B.Ed. students." *Team building* is also a suggestion from a number of participants: "I would implement more mandatory team building sessions at the beginning of the year or workshops on working as a team."

Participants also suggest changes to the composition of the cohorts. Participants generally feel that *smaller cohorts* are better than larger ones, with many participants stating "smaller groups" and a "cap at 40" per section. Some also suggest that there needs to be a "*better gender balance*" and that there is a "lack of males in some sections." Some students even suggest using *personality tests* "to see if they would mesh well" when dividing students into cohorts.

Perspectives on keeping the cohort model in the new two-year B.Ed. program. Finally, when asked, "Do you think Nipissing University should keep the section organization for the new two-year B.Ed. program?" 29 (13.6%) participants feel they *should not* be kept and 122 (61.7%) feel that sections *should* be kept, while the remaining 39 respondents are uncertain. Cross-tabulation analysis produced no significant correlations between the respondents' SoC and their responses to this question.

In the qualitative responses to the follow-up question, "Why?" many students reiterate the benefits of the section model such as SoC, friendships, and creating a professional network. For some, the benefits are so evident that they feel that the organization needs no change. One respondent writes, "There is no need to reinvent the wheel. I would just trade in the car for a newer model." However, a new theme that does not overlap with the earlier benefits of cohorts emerged: the cohort model was a *distinguishing feature* of Nipissing University. As one respondent states, "it is a defining characteristic of Nipissing, and something that sets it apart from other institutions." Another participant explains that not only was the cohort model a major deciding factor in choosing Nipissing University, "It is the #1 reason I recommend Nipissing University."

Participants who feel that sections should not be a part of the new two-year program reiterate some of the drawbacks to cohorts previously mentioned. But a new theme also emerges. A significant number of participants feel that *two years is too long* to be a part of the same section. This sentiment is also expressed by

some participants who favor the section organization in the 1-year program. Some respondents suggest that the sections should change each semester or each year, while others suggest that students should only take their core courses together. For example:

> 2 years is a long time to be locked into a class group that you may not click with. I would maintain sections but switch them up every new school year, so that new people can be experienced and no one gets stuck in a rut.

Other participants reiterate the downside for isolated individuals, writing, "Two years is a long time to spend with the same people if you don't get along with them" and "I couldn't get away from those people fast enough."

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The results of this survey of current students and alumni of the concurrent and consecutive B.Ed. programs at Nipissing University indicate that a sense of community existed during their studies. All four of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) dimensions of sense of community – membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection – were present for the entire sample. The nature of the cohort model seems to enhance students' SoC during their program of study. The participants in the cohort model (consecutive program) experience a greater SoC according to all indicators and across all four dimensions. Meanwhile, the participants in the concurrent program are more neutral as to whether a SoC existed. Neither gender nor on/off campus residence status appears to impact SoC. While there seems to be no difference in SoC between participants in the Primary/Junior and Junior/Intermediate divisions, Primary/Junior and Junior/Intermediate participants experience a greater SoC in comparison to those in the Intermediate/Senior division. Participants that experience a high SoC scored higher on measures of student satisfaction. The greatest difference between students in the cohort model and those in the concurrent program is in the shared emotional connection dimension of SoC, followed by the influence dimension. In fact, both groups rate the influence dimension the lowest. Further research is needed to determine if this lower score is the result of the cohort's limited influence over its members or the members feeling limited in their ability to influence or control the cohort. Improvement in

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the shared emotional connection dimension could come from providing more opportunities for positive interactions during their time of study.

The results about the benefits and drawbacks of the cohort model at Nipissing University are consistent with those reported in the literature. This study finds that the benefits of the cohort model are: sense of community (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Lucas & Robinson, 2002; Ohana 2000), friendship-making (Mather & Hanley, 1999), support (Mather & Hanley, 1999; Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003; Seifert &Mandzuk, 2006; Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006), a safe and trusting space (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003), a realistic simulation which may socialize students to the teaching profession (Lucas & Robinson, 2002), and the ease of scheduling for cooperative group assignments (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003). Overall, sections seem to be a positive experience for students and some students experience no drawbacks. This mainly positive experience of students in cohorts may be a result of selection bias as our sample was taken from a Facebook group of current students and alumni of the university. Future studies could include a sample of all students and graduates from the institution to minimize this bias.

Not all students, however, had positive experiences in their cohorts. Like Radencich et al. (1998), we found that for those students who have negative experiences in their section, their feelings are extreme. Similar to other studies, these students feel stuck in bad sections and experience isolation due to conflicts and cliques (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Ohana, 2000; Radencich et al., 1998). This is perhaps a product of simply spending too much time together (Mather & Hanley, 1999; Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003; Seifert & Mandzuk 2006). Like other studies, this investigation also finds that students believe the cohort model led to too much group work (Radencich et al., 1998) as well as competition and rivalries between sections (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003). Professors are also linked to the negative aspects of the cohort model, including professors labeling sections as good and bad, but also cohorts putting undue pressure onto faculty (Mather & Hanley, 1999; Ohana, 2000; Radencich et al., 1998).

While 84% of participants in the consecutive program indicated that they enjoyed being a member of a cohort,

participants suggest a number of changes to the cohort model at Nipissing. Some of these suggestions are feasible and relatively easy to implement, such as planning more social events and team building activities. Some suggestions from participants might require structural or curricular changes such as offering some choice in course selection, and mixing up the cohorts. Other suggestions by participants are less feasible, such as using personality tests to assign individuals to cohorts. Education administrators should also be aware of cohort composition and consider size, gender balance, and the representation of diverse groups when creating cohorts.

Approximately 62% of students and alumni organized in sections recommend that cohorts continue in the new two-year education program. Seventy-nine percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that the cohort model is a distinguishing feature of the program and is a reason to recommend the program to others. Because the study finds that the section model is more successful in creating a SoC among students than a less structured model (with students in the section model scoring 11.2% higher in our SoC measure), institutions revising or making changes to the structure and delivery of their programs should consider a cohort model as an element of their programs. As a caveat, however, the vast majority of respondents feel that two years would be too long to spend together as a cohort. More research into the use and possible mixing of cohorts for longer professional programs is needed. In the meantime, it is suggested that institutions seek to find a balance between sectioning students and having students spend too much time in cohorts. As suggested by the respondents, cohorts in the two-year program could be mixed at the midpoint of the program or cohorts could take core courses together then branch out to more diverse class rosters for other classes like the open cohort model described by Ohana (2000). As one participant stated, in a two-year program "You have GOT to switch it up."

The results of this study have significant implications for education programs and other disciplines such as nursing, business, and social work that may opt to use a cohort model. It is clear from the literature that a positive SoC is related to important outcomes for post-secondary students (Harris, 2006; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Tinto, 1993, 2012). This study finds, as did Tinto (1993, 2012), that SoC is positively linked with several

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key aspects that are of concern to all post-secondary institutions, including recruitment, alumni donations, and a positive experience of belonging. Other professional programs aside from education could gain these benefits, and further research into using the cohort model in other subject disciplines would be valuable for both research and practice.

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PROGRAM REPORTS

Diversity and Inclusion Curriculum: Addressing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the Achievement Gap at a Racially Diverse University

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Abstract

Supporting faculty in ongoing processes of professional development around culturally relevant pedagogy presents numerous challenges, despite the purported benefits of this educative approach. Though faculty may have a strong desire to enhance skills in culturally relevant teaching, factors including heavy workloads, lack of teaching skills, and sensitivity to receiving potentially uncomfortable feedback impede even well-intentioned faculty. One way we have attempted to address these challenges is through the Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Curriculum Development (FDICD) program. This program involves structured peer support and feedback to assist faculty who want to plan, implement, and evaluate culturally relevant teaching practices in their coursework. This paper reports on a mixed-methods program evaluation, describing the pedagogical changes participants made, as well as the outcomes achieved by students and faculty. Our evaluation suggests that this type of program provides a valuable form of professional development for faculty while also leading to improved student learning outcomes.

Diversity and Inclusion Curriculum: Addressing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the Achievement Gap at a Racially Diverse University

Introduction: Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Curriculum Development (FDICD) Program

In this paper, we will describe the implementation and evaluation of a program designed to enable California State University East Bay (CSUEB) faculty to effectively address diversity and inclusiveness in their coursework. At an institutional level, the Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Curriculum Development (FDICD) program was created to evaluate how CSUEB faculty served its diverse student population. Four-time recipient of the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity award ("Cal State East Bay's Diversity, Inclusion Efforts Honored," 2017), CSUEB has one of the most racially and ethnically diverse student populations in the United States ("Colleges with the Greatest Racial and Ethnic Diversity," 2018). In terms of this racial and ethnic diversity, CSUEB was comprised of 10.1% African American/Black students, 23.4% Asian, as well as 34.3% Hispanic/Latino students in 2017 ("University Facts," 2017). At the same time, this university has recognized the need to provide more courses, services, and support mechanisms to improve low graduation rates and achievement gaps that exist for underrepresented minority students ("Students First," 2017).

One identified institutional vehicle to address student learning outcomes and graduation concerns has been to focus on faculty development and pedagogical revision to incorporate culturally relevant curriculum into the classroom. According to Otten (2003), faculty implementation of culturally relevant instruction and assessments will benefit diverse students, specifically when it comes to the use of varied "teaching methods and working formats and the integration of different types of course assignments." This type of culturally relevant approach can benefit diverse students in their academic achievement as well as their personal growth and social interactions during their university years (Otten, 2003). Furthermore, research has shown that instructional approaches that engage with issues of racial and ethnic diversity contribute greatly to the learning of *all* students, and that this may occur more frequently within racially and ethnically diverse settings ("Does Diversity Make a Difference," 2000).

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Given the benefits of culturally relevant teaching for a unique student body such as ours, the University Diversity Office at CSUEB created the FDICD program, a year-long peer-training program with the goal of empowering faculty to make significant pedagogical and curricular changes to one of their courses, pertaining to cultural relevancy and critical consciousness. This design embedded several best practices from a successful national model developed by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the Assignment Charette ("Assignment Charrette Toolkit," 2012).

The model originates from NILOA's Assignment Library which offers faculty developed assignments and rubrics that align with the Degree Qualifications Profile, a set of learning outcomes expected at completion of associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees, regardless of discipline. This initiative inspired NILOA's Assignment Design Charrettes, a collaborative faculty peer-review process intentionally designing assignments for deeper, more rigorous student learning as well as a more powerful faculty development experience. NILOA recognizes the value of the course assignment as it is "the primary vehicle or mechanism for determining whether or not students have mastered the competency" (Ewell, 2013).

The Assignment Charrettes are comprised of one- or two-day faculty sessions in which participants design scaffolded assignments that are aligned with outcomes, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessments. Sessions include sharing assignments with the guidance of a facilitator and providing each other feedback for strengthening their work. Hutchings, Jankowski, and Ewell (2013) see the Assignment Charrette as a vehicle to help faculty broaden and deepen student learning, improve authentic student accomplishment, and examine the strengths and areas for additional improvement when analyzing how effectively they are achieving student outcomes. The "Assignment Charrette" workshop evolved into an "Assignment Charrette Toolkit" with guidelines and resources for campuses to conduct faculty-driven assignment design charrettes on their own (Hutchings, Jankowski, & Baker, 2018).

When planning for the first FDICD, the Office of Diversity and Office of Educational Effectiveness initiated contact with Pat Hutchings, a Senior Scholar at NILOA and one of the main architects of the Assignment Char-

rette Toolkit. This consultation resulted in modifying the existing model at CSUEB in the following ways: we (1) extended the project over the academic year; (2) required evidence of assessment by participating faculty; (3) created small faculty groups from different disciplines; and (4) provided each group with a faculty leader who was experienced in teaching diversity and inclusion curriculums.

Twelve faculty completed the FDICD program in 2016-2017, and an additional thirteen faculty completed it in 2017-2018. Each faculty cohort met three times over the year to work collaboratively on the planning, implementation, and reflection of their course changes and to share their work with each other. During the project's first half-day meeting, faculty participants shared their proposed plans, gathered feedback from each other, and then adjusted their plans. These faculty members subsequently worked collaboratively to plan, implement, assess, and reflect on course changes through faculty workshops and evidence-based deliverables. This process included curriculum planning, peer-to-peer faculty guidance in small groups, advice on assessments, and the creation of detailed curriculum plans.

For the FDICD, we define "diversity" fairly narrowly, specifically in regards to racial and ethnic diversity. The FDICD project seeks to address the needs of underrepresented minority students, especially African American, Native American, and Latinx students. However, we also address the ways in which racial and ethnic diversity intersects with other diversities, including gender, socioeconomic class, and ability. We define "inclusion" in much the way that Ladson-Billings and others describe Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Underrepresented students should be able to see their own cultures reflected and affirmed in the curriculum while being empowered to recognize, understand, and critique social inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995; Howard, 2003).

In the following sections, we (1) define the key conceptual frameworks guiding our project, (2) discuss the four curricular changes that workshop participants implemented, (3) describe the assessment methods employed, and (4) present the results of our assessment. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the relevance and implications of our project and study.

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

Literature Review: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The principles of culturally relevant pedagogy guided the Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Development Grant program. In the mid-1990s, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy, "a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate." Ladson-Billings built her theoretical model around three criteria. First, culturally relevant teaching must develop students academically. For Ladson-Billings' initial assessment, achievement was measured by multiple measures, including both standardized quantitative and qualitative methods. Second, culturally relevant teaching must nurture and support cultural competence, meaning that students are able to see their own cultures reflected and affirmed in the curriculum as well as maintain their cultural integrity. Third, it must develop a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Culturally relevant teachers "must help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequalities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Since the introduction of culturally relevant pedagogy, the approach has been used extensively in teacher education and professional development programs in order to reduce racial achievement gaps, affirm the cultures of marginalized students, and critique societal inequalities (Lim, Tan, & Saito, 2019; Gay, 2013, 2000; Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006; Howard, 2003). Still, the model is not without criticisms and shortcomings. Some researchers (Foster & Peele, 1999) have observed flaws and constraints in the professional development workshops employing culturally relevant pedagogy, while others (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008) find that teachers are often unable to translate the theory to actual pedagogy. In addition, teachers sometimes struggle to build meaningful relationships with students, families, and communities (Kim and Pulido, 2015). Culturally relevant responsive pedagogy has also been called into question due to trivialized notions of what it is, too little research on its realization of academic achievement, and push-back from privileged or dominant groups (Sleeter, 2012). Much of the resistance to the model stems from "doubts about its validity and as anxieties about anticipated difficulties with its implementation" (Gay, 2013).

Sensitive to the model's difficulties and criticisms, Ladson-Billings (2015) has suggested a "remix" of the theoretical model. For the remix, she embraces a dynamic view of culture as "an amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief systems," insisting that marginalized students should be subjects in the instructional process instead of objects, and that teachers and students must be pushed to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that affect the lives and communities of the students (Ladson-Billings, 2015). In doing so, she recognizes that culturally relevant pedagogy must evolve as students and their social contexts change (Ladson-Billings, 2015).

While critical reflection has been an important component of culturally relevant teaching since the beginning, the remix centralizes reflection (Ladson-Billings, 2015). In a comprehensive review of educational strategies to enhance reflexivity both within health professional students and education more broadly, Landy et al. (2016) compiled a definition of reflection that includes "the ability to critically reflect on one's own social locations or belief systems in relation to larger social norms, and recognition of how one's social locations, privileges, advantages, disadvantages or positions of dominance may shape the way one sees and understands the world." Similarly, Sun (2018) identifies three dimensions of reflection, including the personal, the interpersonal, and the socio-structural. After reflecting on themselves, teachers are better able to assist students in critically examining their own positions of privilege and reflection (Svojanovsky, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2015; Liu, 2015; Sellars, 2012; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Teachers can implement numerous reflective writing strategies—including journaling, autoethnography, autobiographical stories, personal narratives, personal storytelling, reflecting on critical incidents, reflecting on fiction and non-fiction, and reflective essays (Landy, et al., 2016). In addition, experiential learning can be a powerful tool for reflection, especially community-based experiential learning, in-service learning, and exchange experiences (Landy, et al., 2016; Dukewich & Vossen 2015). Supporting students' reflective skills can impact positively on their own development (Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortactepe, 2016; Naber & Wyatt, 2014; Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, Turunen, 2016; Rendón, 2000).

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

In keeping with the three domains of culturally relevant teaching—academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014)—faculty in the FDICD program made the following pedagogical changes and additions to their curriculum: (1) culturally competent and critically conscious topics, (2) heterogeneous learning groups, (3) scaffolded assignments, and (4) reflection assignments. These four curricular changes are described in the next section.

Four Curricular Changes

Overall, four types of curricular and pedagogical changes were enacted by faculty members as part of their participation in this project, which are described below. These changes followed the viewpoint that instructional innovation around cultural competency and critical consciousness in university coursework should be foundational, thorough, and well-considered, rather than superficial or tick-the-box in nature, as suggested by Vanden Bout (2016): "It is one thing to adapt an existing syllabus and nudge it toward more diversity by adding a minority voice or two to the required readings. It is a rather different matter to take diversity as a pedagogical goal in itself, and to take as your creed the expectation that reality is diverse, and that this diversity is a positive value." Each of the four pedagogical changes are discussed in greater depth below.

Culturally Competent and Critically Conscious Topics

First, many faculty in the FDICD program infused topics of diversity, inclusion, cultural competency, and critical consciousness into their existing curriculum. Several scholars (Gomez, 2016; Otten, 2003; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002) have suggested that this type of teaching approach produces numerous student learning benefits, and that students can gain a sense of appreciation (rather than deficit) around their own diverse backgrounds.

Given the saliency of this pedagogical approach, particularly within a highly diverse university campus, several participants in the FDICD workshop explicitly infused discussions of diversity and inclusion into their curriculum. For example, one sociology instructor added the following case study topics in her course on Social Control: policing and the role of race and ethnicity, the connection between the welfare system and incarcer-

ation, Black Lives Matter, and mass incarceration and its consequences. Another instructor revised a literature review assignment to focus on diversity and inclusivity in a course on Research and Writing in Healthcare. This latter instructor required the students to have at least two articles out of the ten that were required to be on specific marginalized communities, whereas before there was no requirement to use research focusing specifically on ethnically or culturally diverse populations or people from lower socioeconomic status (SES) communities. In his Medical Anthropology course, one instructor had his students experience being a different gender. An American Sign Language instructor developed a project in which her students studied Black ASL.

In her Medical Sociology class, an instructor added a unit on the Black Panther Party and its legacy in terms of public health. The specific learning module, entitled "Beyond Berets: The Black Panthers as Health Activists," had curricular additions which included a text, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Nelson 2014). A visit to the Oakland Museum of California's exhibit, "All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50," was also added. To strengthen critical thinking skills, students were asked to compare the news angle, information sources, and construction of different news reports about the BPP anniversary. Students then used what they read and heard to analyze how various media outlets reported on the anniversary and whether or not the BPP's health activism was mentioned (and why that may or may not be the case). Students were asked to examine at least two posted media sources from *Capitol Weekly*, *The Los Angeles Times*, theroot.com, *The Guardian*, and NPR on the fiftieth anniversary of the Black Panther Party (BPP). They were instructed to carefully look for details that illustrate how the media reports differed, to explore any direct contradictions between the sources, and to consider why the differences and similarities might exist. Students were also asked to describe what they could tell about any biases based on the differences and similarities.

Heterogeneous Learning Groups

Second, several participants in the program created heterogeneous, small-group learning contexts to highlight issues of cultural competence and critical consciousness in the curriculum. With diverse student bodies, it has

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been suggested that small, interactive groups emphasizing learning ownership and involving high states of cooperation are valuable (Saravia-Shore, 2016).

In this vein, a Kinesiology instructor had students conduct a thirty-minute interview about their diverse backgrounds with one peer coming from a four-person working team. These teams were created through the team-based learning format, whereby students with different skills and learning interests comprise heterogeneous groups. Another instructor created a bingo game to encourage students to learn about the diversity that they represented in the classroom. She then used that information to create heterogeneous student groups that were tasked with evaluating the diverse hiring practices of Bay Area firms. Furthermore, an engineering instructor used a pre-test early in the quarter to evaluate initial math and physics competencies and then used those evaluations to create heterogeneous student teams including at least one member with stronger-than-average math and physics backgrounds. He then had the student groups complete team-based activities for the course.

A public health instructor also created small groups during class and had her students reflect amongst themselves the benefits of using research studies that include low-income and racially- and ethnically-diverse participants to obtain a fuller, more nuanced, and more accurate picture of population health. This process improved cultural competency and critical consciousness among the students, but it also resulted in students composing literature reviews that were more accurate in their demographic picture of the health-related issues being analyzed. An added significant benefit of these small-group interactions was that students learned a great deal from one another, not only about the subject matter of the various papers, but also how the viewpoints of the student authors were inextricably linked to their own culturally diverse experiences and practices. This sharing of stories allowed students to gain diverse perspectives from their peers which enriched their understanding of each other's lives and created a deeper understanding of the complex situations often faced by their classmates regarding their educational aspirations and life at home.

Scaffolded Assignments

Third, many faculty in the FDICD program incorpo-

rated scaffolded assignments addressing diverse learning styles and abilities. Scaffolding provides authentic learning opportunities for student, develops leaderships skills modeled by the teacher, and helps create an inclusive classroom community (Morcom & MacCallum, 2012). It also helps remedy problems faced by marginalized students, especially second-language learners, by developing their writing effectiveness (Veerappan, Wei Hui, & Sulaiman, 2011; Silva & Muñoz, 2011), and it improves academic achievement (Smith & Cook, 2012). This approach utilizes "prompts, supports, and modeling to build a removable structure" so that students "are better able to analyze and formulate recommendations for real world applications" (Browne, Hough, & Schwab, 2009). Zeichner (1992) further proposes that teachers should scaffold student learning by developing appropriately challenging curricular elements and tasks in accordance with students' own diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In the FDICD, an Ethnic Studies instructor created a scaffolded assignment in which students first researched and developed a presentation on an African American filmmaker who made films before 1971 and culminated with those students developing a pitch for a short film of their own that was inspired by what they had learned throughout the course. Also, an American Sign Language (ASL) instructor created a scaffolded assignment on Black ASL that included a literature review, a term paper, and an in-class presentation.

The public health instructor discussed above also created a scaffolded assignment where prompts for the literature review focused on including more diverse population studies focusing on communities which had been historically omitted from previous research. In this assignment, the instructor asked the students to submit their papers multiple times to be assessed for each important curricular element. Upon each submission, the instructor assessed and commented on the breadth and understanding shown in the partial literature review by the student regarding each element. Then, students were asked to improve or expand upon certain criteria of those elements in the subsequent version. There were four paper submissions for each student per term, with the last and final revision weighted most heavily. This type of assignment structure allowed students to focus on the learning shared by the instructor at each stage rather than the grade on the earlier versions. Ultimately,

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

this type of critical thinking on the part of students often led to student papers which contained a broader set of voices, exemplified a diverse set of lifestyles and cultures, collectively illustrated health and social outcomes for a diverse group of people, and included research papers which shed light on health and social disparities.

Reflection Assignments

Finally, several participating faculty incorporated reflection assignments to help students assess their own development in regards to cultural competency and critical consciousness. According to Trees (2013), within increasingly diverse university environments, instructors should enable students to participate in meaningful learning tasks that enable them to re-examine previously held assumptions, identities, and judgments. Students' reflective assignments have accordingly gained purchase as vital tools to generate learning about diversity, especially within the university setting (Isaac, Behar-Horenstein, Lee, & Catalanotto, 2015; Merryfield, 2001; Milner, 2003). Reflection activities increase students' awareness of how others have influenced their lives and facilitate their questioning of preconceived ideas (Isaac, Behar-Horenstein, Lee, and Catalanotto, 2015), as well as help students take ownership of their learning needs (Vinjamuri, Warde, & Kolb, 2017). Reflection assignments also increase students' cultural competence and self-confidence (Bai, Larimer, & Riner, 2016).

In the FDICD program, for instance, one Anthropology instructor had students conduct ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews on participants with sex and gender identities that differed from their own. He then had the students write a significant personal reflection paper about their own sex and gender identities.

For the 30-minute interview assignment in the Kinesiology class described above, students were expected to devote significant attention to reflection, to gauge their learning in terms of designing the study, collecting data, analyzing transcripts, and then presenting findings. This kind of reflection seemed to reveal a spectrum of engagement with the diversity component, as revealed in the followed excerpts. The first statement provides quite a basic description, while the next two excerpts progressively increase in sophistication and critical thinking.

Student 1: "Having live data with background experience relating to diversity is pretty important in the world today. We are always striving to be more diverse in anything we do but it most definitely has a part in kinesiology."

Student 2: "Though I knew what diversity was going into the interview, Lucy definitely had a new perspective that was eye opening. Knowing her and how she interprets the differences in the world may help me in the future."

Student 3: "I enjoyed this qualitative methodology of doing research, I learned a lot about Kelly's life experiences her own personal perspectives and what influenced her to go into the field of Kinesiology. I know that if I had instead given Kelly a survey on the subject of diversity I would probably have no insight to the factors that influenced and shaped Kelly's life decisions that led her on this path."

Evaluation Methods

Having specifically outlined the types of teaching and learning innovations made by faculty, we now turn to address the impacts of this work. The remainder of the paper will be devoted to characterizing the impact that the FDICD program had on supporting diversity- and inclusion-focused curricular changes, in terms of faculty teaching experiences and student learning outcomes.

A total of twenty-five faculty completed the FDICD program in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. All colleges across the university were represented in the FDICD program. Tenured, tenure-track, and adjunct faculty participated. Faculty participants were asked to write in their race/ethnicity and gender on the survey. Forty percent (40%) of the faculty participants self-identified as white or Caucasian, 20% as Black or African American, 12% as Latinx or Chicanx, 8% as Asian, 8% as Middle Eastern, 8% as mixed-race, and 4% as Jewish. In regards to gender, 60% self-identified as women, 36% as men, and 4% as bi-gender.

Faculty participants self-selected for participation in the FDICD program, which presents one weakness of the analysis. It can be assumed, therefore, that all or most of the participants were already committed to issues of

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

diversity and inclusion prior to their participation. The results of the program might be different if the participants felt largely neutral or antagonistic in regards to diversity and inclusion.

Four methods were utilized to evaluate faculty and student impacts from the program. First, we evaluated academic achievement in order to measure improvements in the student failure rate, paying special attention to the performance of underrepresented minorities. Second, we utilized the rubric crafted for our university's Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (Diversity ILO) and compared results to other courses. Third, we measured the change in second-year faculty participants' multicultural teaching skill and knowledge using the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale, or MTCS (Spanierman, Oh, Heppner, Neville, Mobley, Vaile Wright, Dillon, & Navarro, 2011). Finally, at the end of the program, we collected feedback from participating faculty members to gain better insight into the impact of adopted diversity and inclusive curriculum changes. Each of the four evaluation methods are discussed in greater detail below. Table 1 summarizes what we employed for each evaluation method.

Academic Achievement

In line with Ladson-Billings' assessment of student achievement, we reviewed course grades for all twenty-five courses in both cohorts of the FDICD program and compared the results with the institutional averages.

Special attention was paid to the proportion of underrepresented minorities (URMs) enrolled in each course and the number and percentage of students who failed the course with a grade of D, F, or W (withdraw) or received an incomplete course grade (IC). The corollary of measuring a decline in failure rates means, of course, that the number of students passing the course increases. When those students are underrepresented minorities, a decline in failure rates (and an increase in passing rates) signifies a closure of the achievement gap.

While the analysis of failure rates aligns with quantitative measures of analysis used by Ladson-Billings (1995), it does not account for more subjective forms of academic achievements such as the ability to "pose and solve problems at a sophisticated level." Still, academic grades are used to measure achievement gaps, and they matter in the retention of marginal students. Quite simply, students who do not pass their classes are unable to graduate. We compensated the weaknesses of analyzing failure rates with an assessment of the Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (Diversity ILO), discussed in the next section.

Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (Diversity ILO) Assessment

In order to assess students' ability to apply knowledge of diversity and inclusive themes, we randomly selected student work from two participating courses and assessed it using the university's Diversity ILO rubric, which is a

EVALUATION METHOD	FDICD YEAR 1 (12 FACULTY PARTICIPANTS)	FDICD YEAR 2 (13 FACULTY PARTICIPANTS)
Course Performance	X	X
ILO Assessment	X	
MTCS Assessment		X
Faculty Survey	X	

Table 1: Summary of Evaluation Methods Applied to Each FDICD Project Cohort

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

campus-wide articulation of expectations for all degree recipients. The Diversity ILO states that graduates "will be able to apply knowledge of diversity and multicultural competencies to promote equity and social justice in our communities." The categories of assessment for the rubric include cultural self-awareness, respect for and interest in diverse perspectives, knowledge of diverse worldviews, and communication with diverse individuals and groups. We then compared the results of our assessment of the FDICD courses with data collected from a university-wide Diversity ILO assessment process.

For the two assignments that were aligned with the Diversity ILO, random samples of student work were collected for secondary assessment. The two co-chairs from the ILO Subcommittee conducting the assessment employed a modified "standard setting" procedure, similar to a norming session, which included a thorough review of the rubric. Each of the ten student work samples were assessed twice and the results were provided to the Educational Effectiveness Research Manager. Our results were then compared with eight other courses included in the university-wide Diversity ILO Assessment.

Without question, the results of the Diversity ILO Assessment would have been improved had we taken a random sample of student assignments from all twenty-five courses taught by participating faculty. Unfortunately, however, only two of the courses had assignments that were aligned to the ILO rubric. Both faculty had previously participated in a separate pilot assessment of student work for the Diversity ILO rubric. Having found it to be a valuable contribution demonstrating solid evidence of student learning for diversity and inclusion, they opted to align the rubric with their FDICD-affiliated courses. In future iterations of the FDICD program, we hope to align all courses with the rubric in order to generate a more complete understanding of the program's effects.

Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS)

For the second year of the FDICD project, we conducted a pre- and post-test of participating faculty using the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS) developed by Lisa Spanierman and her colleagues (2011). Based on a comprehensive review of the extant literature on multicultural teaching competency, the researchers developed the sixteen-factor survey instru-

ment to measure teachers' self-reported multicultural teaching competence. Then, they surveyed 548 pre- and post-service teachers using the scale and conducted both an exploratory and a confirmatory factor analysis to test its validity. They found that the MTCS performed better than competing scales at measuring "(a) self-reported skills or behaviors in implementing culturally sensitive teaching practices and (b) self-reported knowledge of culturally responsive theories, resources, and classroom strategies" (Spanierman et al., 2011).

We modified the MTCS items for our goals with the FDICD program. Most notably, we added items that measured faculty's self-reported ability to teach diverse gender and sexual orientation groups as well as students with disabilities. Then, we had a second-year cohort of FDICD participants complete the modified MTCS prior to beginning the program. At the conclusion of their involvement in the program, we had faculty repeat the modified MTCS.

As mentioned previously, it can be assumed that the twenty-five participants in the FDICD program were already proponents of diversity and inclusion since they self-selected to enroll in the project. Therefore, it's also possible that they had higher-than-average levels of multicultural competency than randomly selected faculty. For this reason, we had participants complete the MTCS twice—once at the beginning of their participation in the FDICD and once at the end.

Faculty Survey

Finally, the twelve faculty participating in the first year of the program completed an eighteen-question survey consisting of eight Likert-type survey questions and ten open-ended questions. The questions aimed to gain a better insight into the impact of adopted diversity and inclusive pedagogical and curriculum practices. Responses were received from the majority of first-year faculty participants (eleven of twelve). While the survey reflects the opinions of the faculty regarding the FDICD project, it does not necessarily measure the effectiveness of improving academic achievement or increasing multicultural competency. For this reason, we include the faculty survey as an addendum to the other evaluation methods employed.

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

Results

The results of the program evaluation altogether indicate that students and faculty both benefited from the FDICD program, as reported in qualitative and quantitative mechanisms. The following subsections describe the results of the evaluation and assessment measures in greater detail.

Academic Achievement

Based on our analysis of student failure rates, as defined by a grade of "D," "F," "W" (withdrew), or "IC" (incomplete), students in the redesigned FDICD courses had a failure rate that was slightly lower than the institutional average. Students in the first cohort of redesigned courses had an 8.4% failure rate, and students in the second cohort had a 5.5% failure rate, compared to an institutional average of 8.7%. Underrepresented minority (URM) student enrollment in the twelve courses whose instructors participated in the first year of the FDICD

ranged from 20-82%, with the lowest URM enrollment in science courses. The failure rates ranged from 0 to 21%, with the highest rate in an Ethnic Studies course.

Academic achievement results for the first year of the program are included in Table 2. Among students who received a DFW or IC grade, the proportion of URMs who failed the course was considered. Across all courses participating the first-year of the FDICD program, the achievement gap among students who received a failing grade was 6%. Among URM, 12% received a DFW grade, while 6% of non-URM students received a similar grade.

In regards to the retention of the 417 students who participated in one of the first-year FDICD courses, 20% graduated that academic year, and 73% were enrolled in the following academic year. This accounts for 93% of the students participating in FDICD courses and speaks strongly for the retention of FDICD students.

Department	ENROLLMENT			COURSE PERFORMANCE		PROPORTION OF URMS WITH DFW OR IC GRADES	
	Section Count	#URM	%URM	#DFW	%DFW	#URM	%URM
Industrial Engineering	49	10	20%	7	14%	4	40%
Health Sciences	23	11	48%	4	17%	3	27%
Kinesiology	35	11	31%	2	6%	2	18%
Sociology and Social Services	22	18	82%	3	14%	3	17%
Ethnic Studies	33	19	58%	7	21%	3	16%
Modern Languages and Literature	25	19	76%	4	16%	3	16%
Computer Science	38	8	21%	3	8%	1	13%
Health Sciences	33	10	30%	1	3%	0	0%
Health Sciences	53	19	36%	1	2%	0	0%
Sociology & Social Services	22	15	68%	0	0%	0	0%
Marketing	35	14	40%	0	0%	0	0%
Anthropology, Geography, & Environmental Studies	49	14	29%	0	0%	0	0%
Average for all Courses	**35**	**14**	**45%**	**3**	**8%**	**2**	**12%**

Table 2: Proportion of Underrepresented Minorities (URMS) with Failing Grades (FDICD Year 1)

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

The second year of the FDICD program saw improvements in failure rates compared to the first year. The failure rates ranged from 0% to 21%, and the average failure rate was 5.4% compared to the university average of 8.4%. Instructors who taught the same course prior to participating in the FDICD program saw an average 4% decrease in their DFW rate.

Among students who received a DFW or IC grade, the proportion of URMs who failed the course also improved in the second year. Eight of the thirteen courses had URM failure rates of 0%, and the highest URM failure rate was 38%. The second year of the program also saw a disappearance of the achievement gap. The average URM failure rate dropped to 6%, which equals the failure rate for non-URM students. Academic achievement results for the second year are included in Table 3.

Department	ENROLLMENT			COURSE PERFORMANCE		PROPORTION OF URMS WITH DFW OR IC GRADES	
	Section Count	#URM	%URM	#DFW	%DFW	#URM	%URM
Anthropology, Geography, & Environmental Studies	22	8	36%	6	27%	3	38%
Biology	36	16	44%	5	14%	3	19%
Criminal Justice	50	34	68%	4	9%	3	9%
Biology	35	12	34%	2	6%	1	8%
Health Sciences	34	12	35%	2	6%	1	8%
History	28	13	46%	1	4%	0	0%
Music	26	13	50%	1	4%	0	0%
Sociology & Social Services	47	28	60%	0	0%	0	0%
Nursing	8	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Kinesiology	26	9	35%	0	0%	0	0%
Hospitality, Recreation, and Tourism	23	21	91%	0	0%	0	0%
Educational Psychology	15	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
English	11	6	55%	0	0%	0	0%
Average for All Courses	**28**	**13**	**43%**	**2**	**5%**	**1**	**6%**

Table 3: Proportion of Underrepresented Minorities (URMS) with Failing Grades (FDICD Year 2)

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (Diversity ILO) Assessment

Our assessment of the Diversity ILO indicates that students enrolled in the redeveloped courses scored higher than the university average. The averaged assessment for two FDICD courses met and exceeded institutional means for three out of the four domains.

The "cultural awareness" domain of the Diversity ILO rubric measures students' ability to recognize their positions and identities in and among diverse groups both locally and globally. Figure 1 reports the results of our assessment compared to the university-wide assessment from the previous year. The reprogrammed FDICD courses are labeled Course 9 and 10 on the figure.

According to our results, the institutional average for cultural self-awareness is 2.72, while the mean for the FDICD courses is 3.1, indicating that students in the reprogrammed courses were better able to recognize and identify their own assumptions, stereotypes, judgments, and biases about themselves and others.
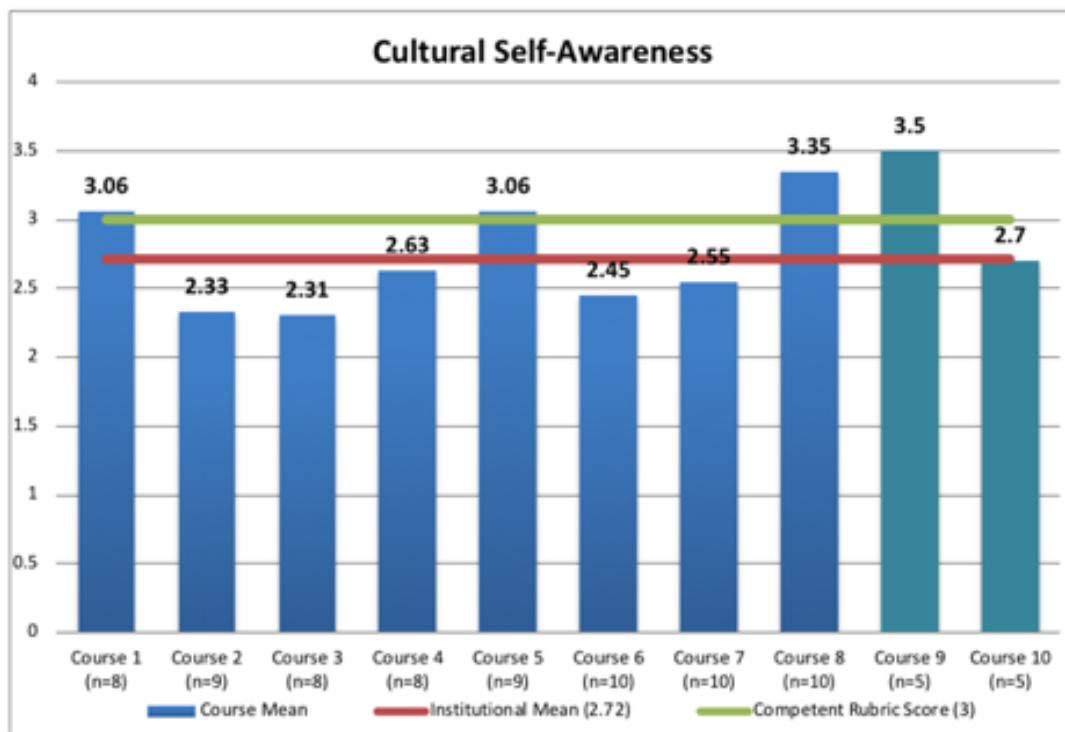

Figure 1: Diversity ILO Domain: Cultural Self-Awareness

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

The "knowledge of diverse perspectives" domain of the Diversity ILO rubric measures students' understanding and respect for different points of view, as well as their engagement with people of diverse identities and positions. Figure 2 illustrates how the FDICD courses (labeled course 9 and 10) compare to the university's assessment from the prior year. The FDICD courses had an average score of 3.15 compared to the institutional mean of 2.83, indicating that the students in the reprogrammed courses demonstrated strong evidence of knowledge of diverse views in areas such as values, communication styles, and practices.
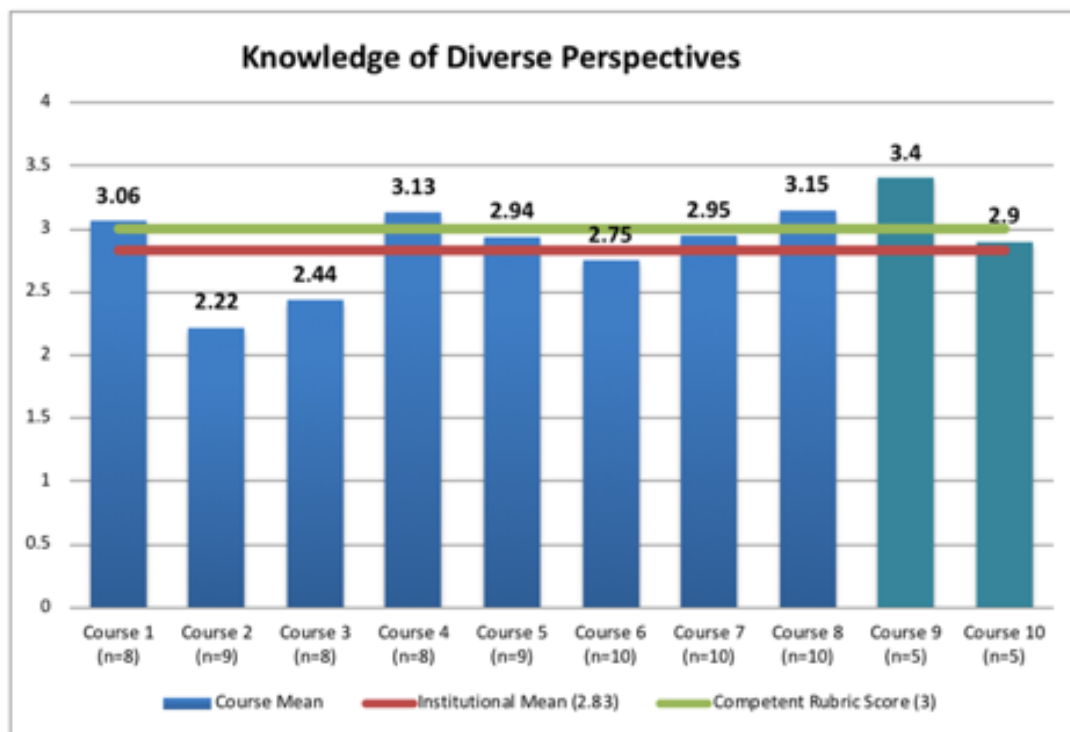

Figure 2: Diversity ILO Domain: Knowledge of Diverse Perspectives

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

The "respect for diverse perspectives" domain of the ILO rubric measures students' evidence of respect in descriptions of different points of view. Figure 3 illustrates how the redesigned courses (labeled course 9 and 10) compare to the university averages. The FDICD average is 2.85, which falls below the institutional mean of 2.98. This indicates that the FDICD program could do better to train instructors to foster understanding and respect for different points of view.

It's important to note that "respect for diverse perspectives" is a higher-order goal for diversity and inclusion. To show respect for diverse perspectives, a student must first build "cultural awareness" and then "knowledge of diverse perspectives" before respect can be built. It appears, therefore, that the curricular changes made in the FDICD program built a foundation for higher-order levels of diversity and inclusion. However, more needs to be done to meet the higher-order requirements. A discussion of what that might be is included in the discussion.
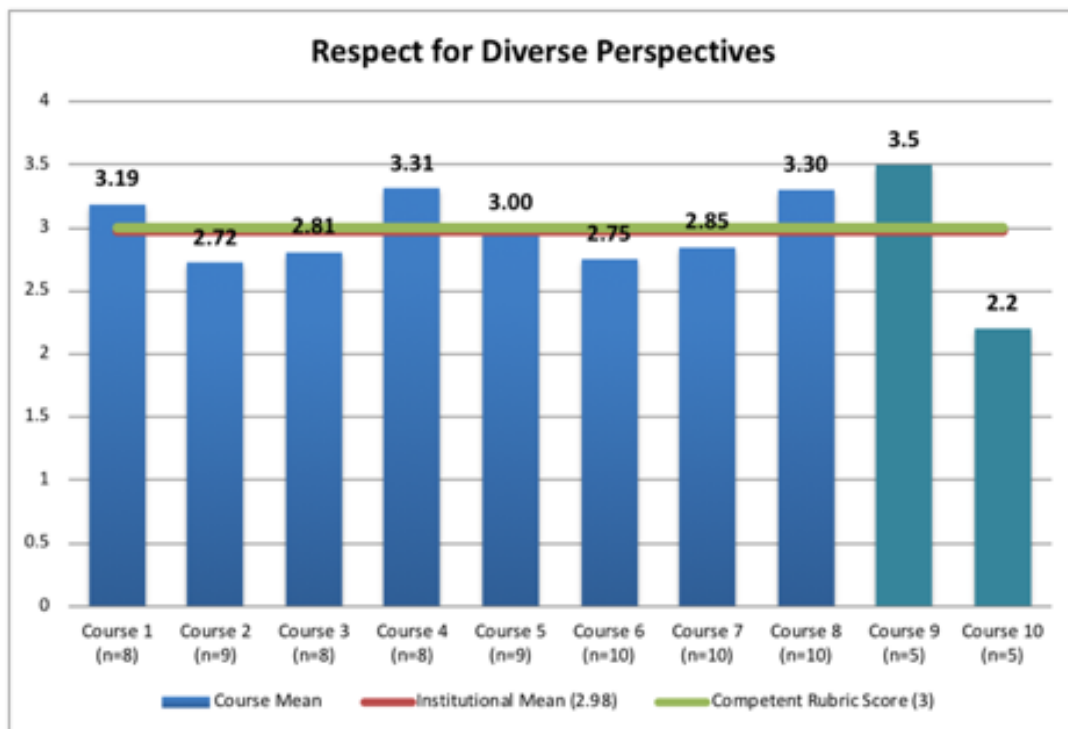

Figure 3: Diversity ILO Domain: Respect for Diverse Perspectives

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

The "reflection on interaction with diverse people and perspectives" domain of the Diversity ILO rubric measures students' analysis of how interactions with people of diverse identities and positions influence one's understandings. Figure 4 demonstrates how the FDICD courses compare to the university average. The FDICD average is 3.15 compared to the university average of 2.71, indicating that students in the FDICD courses show a sophisticated understanding of working with diverse individuals and groups.
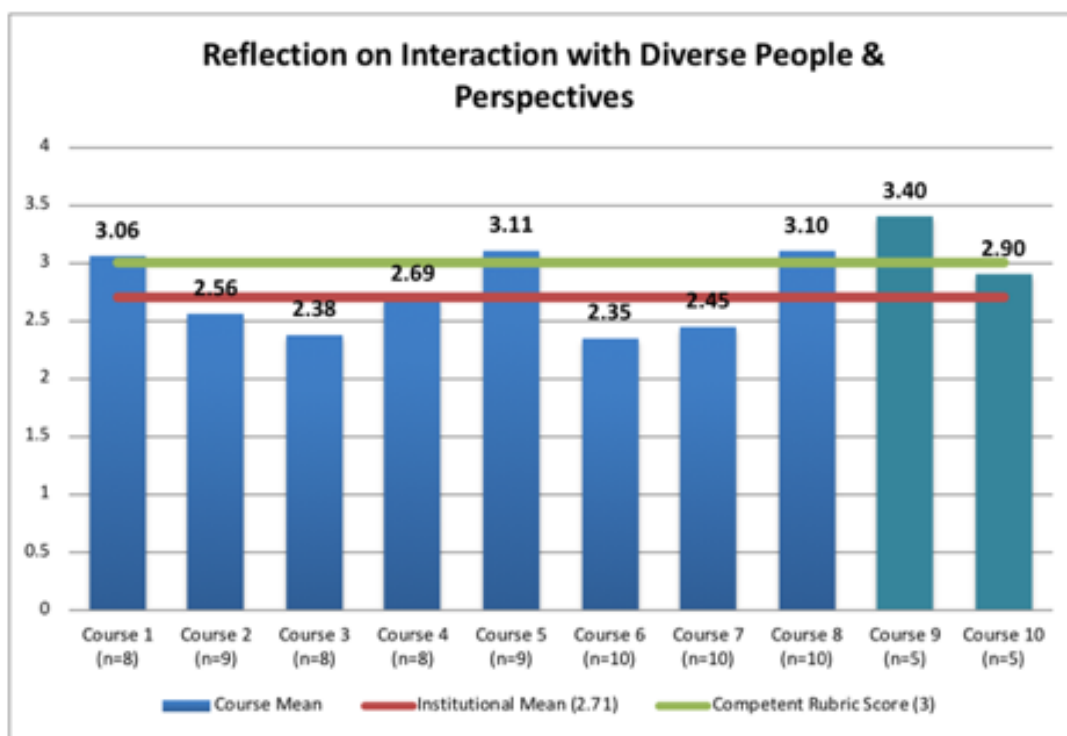

Figure 4: Diversity ILO Domain: Reflection on Interaction with Diverse People and Perspectives

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS)

We saw marked improvement in faculty members' self-reported multicultural teaching competence before and after participating in the FDICD project. Table 3 lists the fifteen questions we adapted from the modified MTCS. Possible responses were on a five-point Likert Scale, including "strongly disagree," coded 1, to "strongly agree," coded 5. The final columns of Table 4 report the average response score for each survey item.

Average responses for the pre-test items ranged from 3.00 to 4.17, with an average for all pre-test items of 3.63. Average responses for the post-test items ranged from 3.75 to 4.67 with an average for all post-test items of 4.25. Increases for each survey item ranged from 0.25 to 1.25, with an average increase of 0.62. These results indicate a solid improvement in multicultural teaching competency from the beginning of the FDICD program until its culmination.

ITEM#	ITEM 1=STRONGLY DISAGREE, 5=STRONGLY AGREE	PRE-TEST AVERAGE	POST-TEST AVERAGE	AVERAGE INCREASE
1	I plan many activities to value diverse cultural practices in my classroom.	4.00	4.50	0.50
2	I understand the various communication styles among different racial and ethnic minority students in my class.	3.58	4.08	0.50
3	I consult regularly with other faculty members or administrators to help me understand multicultural issues related to instruction.	3.42	3.75	0.33
4	I have a clear understanding of culturally-responsive pedagogy.	3.33	4.33	1.00
5	I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during my lectures.	4.17	4.50	0.33
6	I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of diverse gender and sexual orientation groups during my lectures.	3.75	4.17	0.42
7	I often include examples of the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities during my lectures.	3.67	3.92	0.25
8	I am knowledgeable about multicultural identity theories.	3.00	4.25	1.25
9	My curricula integrate topics and events from diverse and multicultural populations.	4.08	4.50	0.42
10	I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of various racial and ethnic minority groups may affect students' learning.	3.67	4.25	0.58
11	I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of diverse gender and sexual orientation groups may affect students' learning.	3.42	4.25	0.83
12	I am knowledgeable of how historical experiences of people with disabilities may affect students' learning.	3.58	4.08	0.50
13	I make changes to create an inclusive environment to ensure that diverse multicultural student populations are engaged.	3.83	4.67	0.83
14	I am knowledgeable about the particular teaching strategies that affirm the racial and ethnic identities of all students.	3.33	4.17	0.83
15	I rarely examine the instructional materials I use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias. (Responses reversed to remain parallel with other items.)	3.58	4.33	0.75
AVG	**Average**	**3.63**	**4.25**	**0.62**

Table 4: MTCS Scale (Spanierman et al. 2011) adapted for FDICD

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

Faculty Survey

Overall, according to the survey administered to faculty at the conclusion of the first year of the FDICD project, faculty participants were extremely satisfied with their FDICD experience and reported a positive impact on their teaching effectiveness and approach to student learning. In addition, they were more confident about incorporating culturally competent and critically conscious topics to their curriculum and assignments. Fifty-five percent of the participants indicated that participation in the program had a "high degree" of impact on their teaching effectiveness, and 45% indicated that it had "some degree" of impact. In addition, 64% felt that the program had a "high degree" of impact on how they envisioned and approached student learning, and 36% believed it had "some degree" of impact.

Qualitative responses complement this quantitative data. Faculty often reported that their views on and approach to student learning had changed as a result of participation in the FDICD grant. It was usually the case that faculty were able to improve their teaching by prioritizing diversity topics in course projects and discussions, and by explicitly focusing upon students' diverse backgrounds. This led to purported benefits in terms of student learning experiences and achievement, as exemplified in the next quote:

> "I made diversity and inclusion the center of course goals and in a midterm survey all the students supported it. Here is what students wrote in the survey: 'I love this class so much, hearing other students experiences from different backgrounds helps me understand that the world is a lot bigger than I thought,' 'Continue to have topics that everyone can relate to,' 'I think I am becoming better at comparing new information to my life experiences,' and 'We can connect all materials to current situations which makes it fun to learn.'"

We can also see from the above and following quotes that students seemed to appreciate faculty course innovations centered around diversity. Students felt more comfortable and motivated during lessons:

> "The feedback I received on the last day of class about the inclusiveness they [students] felt about

the intentional community we built together was beautiful. They felt like they not only belonged in this learning space but they were supported for and cared for regardless of their age, commute, years out of school, language abilities, sexual orientation etc."

> "Students became very interested in participating in different activities. All spoke openly about their experiences and how the course helps them acquire important new knowledge. They all felt respected and acknowledged, bringing diverse perspectives to our class discussions and the written assignments. For the first time in years, I had no D and few C grades for this upper division course."

The next two comments indicate how students enjoyed the diversity-focused assignments and activities, which also provided them with new, deeper insights about the place of diversity in their disciplines:

> "I was pleasantly surprised at how much the students liked the diversity assignment and so will continue using this in similar future classes because I felt it empowered the students and gave them insight and knowledge on this important topic. I also had several students tell me that they really enjoyed one of the assignments and got a lot out of the assignment."

> "My participation in the FDICD project did contribute to student success in several ways. 1). Many of the students really enjoyed the assignment because of the personal nature of the assignment … 2). Some told me that they were surprised to find out what they did for the assignment and it deepened their understanding about certain issues. 3). By doing one of the assignments they realized its importance and would continue looking for diversity-related information to use in their assignments, primarily because they understood how important it was."

The FDICD program also enhanced students' ability to link classroom learning with the broader, diverse world outside of the university classroom in a meaningful way, as reported by faculty in the next two quotes:

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

"A lot of the students were not engaged in multicultural field work outside of their classes in previous quarters. However, they shared that they felt inspired to volunteer and intern at community organizations to promote inclusiveness and positive changes that they became passionate about. They wanted to continue to build professional and social multicultural networks that they identified with."

"After I explained the assignment the students were so enthusiastic. In my opinion there is a need for assignments that include those otherwise left out … the assignment reflected diversity and enabled students to open up about themselves and how they see the gender diversity as part of the changing world around them."

We can see from the above comments that faculty appreciated how students were able to actively and authentically learn about diversity in their disciplines while also enjoying their learning processes. This was the result of numerous pedagogical innovations and content additions that came about from the faculty group discussions. The course changes occurred in a fundamental manner, or as one faculty member simply stated, "Diversity and inclusion are part of the fabric of the courses we teach, not something to be added to the course materials." The following set of quotes indicate some key pedagogical changes that faculty made, reflecting practices such as cultural relevancy and critical consciousness, as well as implementing heterogeneous group learning, scaffolded assignments, and reflection assignments.

"Examples of health disparities [now] include other cultures that are not mentioned in the textbook."

"Group activities, group quizzes, and presentations on real-world examples were all designed according to their differences and diversity and all of them helped them to perform better in the course."

"The final research paper … showed that students have developed the necessary skills to do academic research … and make diversity and inclusion an important focus.

"I found that [reflection] questions that introduced diversity issues could easily be introduced in all the courses I teach regardless of the theoretical content."

Faculty also consistently reported that they were personally affected, motivated, and even transformed by pedagogical and curricular innovations:

"It helped me as an instructor be more mindful of how to better support the diverse needs/wants/challenges/strengths of the collective class which better supported overall success of the class."

"The FDICD project upped my game and made me smart about gender inclusivity. It has improved my outreach to and empathy for the student body by 110%."

"I was constantly inspired by the experiences my students shared in class."

"While my fundamental passion for teaching did not change, my consciousness of diversity and social justice escalated."

"It has made me value … teaching our diverse students, as I got to read about their cultural background and personal struggles in their assignments."

Furthermore, faculty working in this teaching-intensive university valued and appreciated the opportunity to engage with peers on campus in a unique professional learning environment. When asked to describe the nature of FDICD participation, faculty offered the following statements:

"Really enjoyed working with earnest and insightful colleagues from around the campus. This does not happen often, and I learned from each meeting about new ideas, assignments, assessments, and strategies to be used (formative and summative)."

"This was a phenomenal experience and I am humbled and grateful for this fantastic experience. For me to be able to hear about other diversity and inclusion initiatives in the classroom and to hear feedback of my ideas, was an incredible blessing… I valued each meeting and soaked in as much as I could."

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

"It feeds the soul to share space with a group that shares my passion for diversity and inclusion. I was fed, encouraged, and uplifted!"

Finally, we also found that faculty wanted more sustained professional development and collaborative networks in the same vein as the FDICD, in order to continue making progress toward their diversity teaching and student learning goals:

"My overall teaching approach has also changed because I feel more relaxed about discussing diversity with a broad and diverse group of students. Always room for improvement though, so I would suggest we do more exercises on some successful techniques to open discussions on some difficult topics."

"I thought the FDICD sessions were really helpful and would like to continue this discussion from time to time. Perhaps we can all meet again … and continue to share stories about what works and what doesn't and how to overcome some of the obstacles we encounter in some of the diversity activities."

Discussion and Conclusion

In order to serve increasingly diverse student bodies and to assist in developing a truly democratic and pluralistic society, research has demonstrated that diversity and critical consciousness should be infused into every aspect of higher education (Smith 2009). According to Otten (2003), "a diversified curriculum helps to bridge differences, both on campus and in society. Learning about the diversity and global cultural traditions brings groups of students together rather than dividing them," and furthermore, it challenges "students to think in more complex ways about identity and history, and avoid cultural stereotyping." Many instructors, however, may feel inadequately prepared to teach in racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse classrooms (Spanierman et al., 2011). Therefore, it is imperative that professional development contexts facilitate the development of intercultural learning in order to meet the learning needs of contemporary students (Otten, 2003). Given the increasingly diverse composition of higher education settings, instructors should reflect upon what, how, and why they are teaching. This means, according to one scholar, contemplating effective learning practices, ensuring course relevance for students in terms of everyday and future lives, and helping them become "ethical global citizens" (Trees, 2013).

In this article, we outline above how participating FDICD faculty substantially incorporated topics of cultural relevancy and critical consciousness into their existing curriculum, created heterogeneous learning groups, scaffolded assignments, and utilized personal reflection activities, in order to enhance student learning outcomes and rectify achievement gaps for underrepresented minority students. Four measures were then used to evaluate program impacts, specifically in terms of academic achievement, institutional learning outcomes, and multicultural teaching competency.

In accordance with culturally relevant pedagogy, we aimed to improve the academic achievement, cultural competency, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 1995) of Cal State East Bay faculty and their students—especially African American, Native American, and Latinx students. The results of our analysis indicate that when faculty are enabled to enact curricular changes through participation in a sustained, institutionally-supported professional development context, then important benefits can occur. We saw a slight improvement in the academic achievement for both cohorts of the program compared to the university average. Students in redesigned courses also met and exceeded institutional means for all areas except one of the Diversity Institutional Learning Outcomes rubric. In addition, pre- and post-program surveys using the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (Spanierman et al., 2011) showed that participating faculty improved in every measured aspect of multicultural teaching skill and knowledge. Finally, FDICD faculty reported a positive impact on their teaching effectiveness and student learning, and improved confidence, motivation, and skill when it comes to incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into their curriculum and assignments. Faculty desired further opportunities to continue learning from and working with colleagues, which reminds us that professional development opportunities for educators should not be "one-off," but rather sustained and allowed to proliferate into various formats and areas of knowledge construction (Atencio, Jess, & Dewar, 2012).

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

However, the results of our analysis are not entirely positive. Student assignments in the FDICD-affiliated courses indicated a lower-than-university-average level of respect for diverse perspectives. Using culturally relevant pedagogy allowed us to take the first step in addressing those needs, but there still exists a greater need for faculty and students to go deeper and grapple more with the concepts of cultural competency and critical reflection so that they may eventually embody those concepts in a more sustained way. Maybe the solution to academic success for underrepresented minorities might not lie in finding the "right" teaching methods or strategies (Bartalome, 1994). Instead, the next step might need to focus on increasing the political clarity of the university instructors so that they can recognize society's inequities and empower marginalized students to undermine and/or overturn their subordination (Beauboeuf-Lafonant, 1999). Perhaps, then, the final step can be culturally sustaining pedagogies that educate and empower instructors and students to create a more just and equitable society (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Following our evaluation of the FDICD, we recommend that universities interested in serving increasingly diverse student bodies, reducing racial and ethnic student achievement gaps, improving the multicultural competency of their faculty, and more broadly aiding in the development of a pluralistic and democratic society should take the first steps we have highlighted here and implement interdisciplinary faculty working groups charged with making significant diversity and inclusiveness curriculum and pedagogical innovations. Diverse universities may also consider targeting courses in disciplines with the highest achievement gaps, as well as disciplines with known bottleneck courses and with lower enrollments of underrepresented minority students. New faculty members could also benefit from this type of professional development opportunity. In addition, we recommend that the collaborative working groups be designed with strong assessment mechanisms built into their structure in order to measure faculty development, while it is also imperative to gauge students' learning experiences as well as evaluate their progress toward institutional learning outcomes. Upon this foundation, perhaps then, further steps can be taken to perpetuate and foster positive social transformation.

Diversity and Inclusion *continued*

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BOOK REVIEWS

Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning. James M. Lang. Jossey-Bass. 2016

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We are in the midst of a vast expansion of literature on effective and student-centered teaching practices. The breadth and interdisciplinarity of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) as a field means that we can easily be overwhelmed by new advice, proposed "best practices," and vestigial folk wisdom. James Lang, in his book *Small Teaching,* recognizes the gap between scientific knowledge and practice in efforts to confront the challenge of improving student learning and motivation. Lang synthesizes numerous studies with his own experiences, practices, and reflections to share useful and easily-applicable small adjustments instructors can make to improve student learning. Ultimately, he proposes that these small changes are not in fact that small, and through engaging with them, readers will develop all of the tools and ideas needed to fully redesign a course.

I read the book as facilitator for a faculty learning community with thirty-five members from numerous disciplines. Participants were divided into three groups, and each small group met four times during the semester. In this context, Lang's success in writing for a large multidisciplinary audience was evident. In synthesizing this vast body of scholarship, he manages to avoid many writers' compulsion to delve too deep "into the weeds" of research methodology and statistical minutiae. In each chapter, Lang tends to rely on a single approach, theory, and/or author in great detail for his explanation and examples, rather than presenting competing schools of thought. This might be disappointing to readers who seek a critical evaluation of competing approaches or want every assertion linked to detailed studies. However, this is not what Lang promises, and none of the faculty members in our community saw this as a flaw.

The structure of the book as a whole and each individual chapter supports reading from beginning to end and/or using the book as a continuing reference source.

The book divides into three large sections: "Knowledge," "Understanding," and "Inspiring." These sections progress from strategies for sharing and retaining information to applying and using that information, and ultimately thinking about preparing learners for life beyond our classroom. Each of these three sections also divides into three chapters, which follow a consistent organizational strategy. Each chapter begins with a short introduction, often centered on an engaging story from Lang's life and experience. This leads into a short theoretical section, including an engaging overview of scientific studies. Most of our discussions focused on the "models" sections, as they provide specific ways to apply a particular concept or idea. This is where Lang delves into more detail, using real-world examples (from his own and others' teaching experiences) to help readers understand how to integrate theory and practice. The final sections of each chapter provide short highlights and key concepts, often empowering instructors to reflect on strategies they have developed, and to recognize concepts that may support their own teaching practices. For many in the reading groups, this confirmed that some of their existing teaching practices were theoretically grounded, while also encouraging further refinement. Having provided an overview of the book and its structure, I will now discuss ideas from individual sections and chapters.

In the "Knowledge" section of the book, Lang's three chapters each focus on principles that have been shown to help students retain information: retrieving, predicting, and interleaving. The "Retrieving" chapter emphasizes the importance of frequent low-stakes assessments and provides concrete strategies for incorporating these assessments unobtrusively at the beginning and ending of class sessions. The "Predicting" chapter demonstrates a transition from memorization to more complex cognitive tasks, and tools for using prediction at the start or end of a class session. Here, Lang suggests adopting

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a prediction-exposure-feedback structure for course material, with examples of how it can be used in a variety of disciplinary contexts, such as design and literature. The "Interleaving" chapter addresses broader course organization strategies, encouraging teachers to frequently return to earlier concepts and skills, highlighting mixed rather than mass practice. The chapter on interleaving, in particular, highlights the multiple functions of the book by providing a specific strategy in designing a course, while also very explicitly connecting to the previous chapters through returning to short activities at the start and end of a class meeting.

The second large section, "Understanding," may seem misleading to those who regularly work with Bloom's taxonomy. Lang does not use understanding as a lower-order cognitive function. Instead, he uses it as many faculty members do, to represent an ability to apply, analyze, and synthesize knowledge, information, and skills. The "Connecting" chapter details ways to integrate new concepts with already existing ones, and emphasizes the role of instructors in facilitating these connections. The chapter on "Practicing" lays out a strategy for scaffolding work through breaking down big projects into smaller pieces. This encourages mastery of complex tasks through spaced repetition. The final chapter of this section, "Self-Explaining," provides theoretical approaches and practical strategies for promoting meta-cognitive skills in our students. Lang makes an effort to bring self-explanation strategies beyond the STEM classroom, where they have traditionally been studied. For example, after having students practice part of an assignment, he suggests asking them to reflect on why they made the decisions that they made. He also ties this concept to peer instruction and think-aloud activities, with examples from classwork, online work, and meetings with students during office hours.

While the first two large sections deal with fairly traditional types of class activities, the third and final section, "Inspiration," takes a slightly different approach, focusing on how we can take advantage of emotions and attitudes to help students learn. For many instructors who had already adapted a variety of practices described in the earlier chapters, the inspiration section was especially powerful, opening new paths for discussion and experimentation. The "Motivation" chapter highlights multiple strategies for engaging students before the class

begins. For example, Lang recommends sharing something for students to begin thinking about related to the class as students enter the room. Alternately, he describes the benefit of using pre-class time to speak with and get to know all of the students (including those in the back). Other strategies ask the reader to carefully consider how we will enhance the relevance of our teaching through telling stories, sharing enthusiasm and compassion, and invoking the broader purpose of our work.

The second chapter of the "Inspiring" section, "Growing," focuses on developing growth mindsets for ourselves and our students. What makes Lang's approach to mindsets valuable is the type of practical applications and tools he offers for developing students' mindsets. He divides these into three broad ideas: first, design a course with growth as an aim through giving opportunities to grow and rewarding successful growth. Second, communicate growth mindsets both formally and informally (recognizing that currently a great deal of positive feedback is framed through fixed-mindsets). Finally, focus on formative feedback, rather than summative feedback, and emphasize the need for students to work hard to improve. The final chapter, "Expanding," offers more of a new beginning than a conclusion. Most readers of the book will find some small ideas that they will attach to immediately, but the book's real power is in changing how we think about and approach a wide range of course elements. "Expanding" highlights this idea by directly pointing readers to broader course design strategies that can have a high impact on student learning, including activity-based learning, service learning, and games and simulations. While each of these are much broader topics, Lang effectively introduces the reader to them through examples of how they may be incorporated into a class while providing a one-paragraph summary of the principles that underlie these teaching strategies. The end of the chapter serves as a short path to further development, highlighting some of Lang's favorite books, websites, and Twitter users.

In a time when numerous books on college teaching appear each year, Lang's stands out for its ability to genuinely engage a wide audience of readers. Whether new teachers or experienced award-winners, readers from any field will find valuable insights in Lang's work. I regularly return to particular chapters and sections (I have re-read the predicting chapter countless times). While I heart-

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ily recommend reading the book cover to cover, where many through-lines can be found, every chapter is indeed self-contained. And within those chapters, the structure allows us to return to key summaries and methods with ease. Writers on teaching who find a balance between research, narratives, and guidance are rare, and this is precisely what makes Lang's contribution so unique. It is hard to imagine anyone whose teaching would not be changed in small and large ways after reading the book.

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