INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION AND METACOGNITIVE

REFLECTION: A CASE STUDY OF FACULTY TEACHING IN LEARNING

COMMUNITIES

by

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Abstract

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This qualitative case study examines the nature of faculty collaboration

within the context of academic learning communities using third generation

activity theory as an organizing framework. First, this study investigates how

faculty collaborate across disciplinary lines to create and implement curriculum

for paired and team-taught interdisciplinary learning community courses.

Furthermore, this study seeks to understand whether these collaborative practices

provide opportunities for discipline-based metacognitive reflection. Through the

analysis of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and course

documents, the study findings confirm that learning communities do, in fact,

create opportunities for faculty to become more self-aware of their own

disciplinary conventions and how they differ from other fields within higher

education; however, these opportunities for reflection are also tied to faculty being given additional opportunities to reflect upon their collaborative learning community experiences in meaningful ways outside their classrooms. While this dissertation argues discipline-based metacognitive reflection is not a guaranteed by-product of faculty participation in learning communities, thoughtfully implemented and supported institutional structures can make this form of reflection possible and beneficial to faculty and students who participate in this curricular model.

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Introduction to the Project and Research Questions

One of the most important questions facing higher education today is how to increase interdisciplinary collaboration in response to the highly connected and global society in which we now find ourselves. For this reason, it is increasingly important for educators to examine the ways cross-disciplinary teaching and learning can allow teachers and students to pose questions and solve problems otherwise ignored or overlooked within traditional disciplinary boundaries. While the academy has been largely marked by specialization and disciplinary segregation for the last 150 years, faculty today are realizing the benefits of reaching across disciplinary lines to help students make knowledge connections, improve critical thinking, and become better problem solvers.

As a result, a number of pedagogical trends have emerged in recent decades to make this type of collaboration possible and fruitful for faculty and students alike. While the student component of learning communities has been widely represented in the literature, this study examines how the implementation of learning communities provides important opportunities for faculty to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration and reflect on what Michael Carter calls the "ways of knowing and doing" that have come to characterize the disciplines in which they have been trained.

This study evolved from simply observing several of my colleagues from multiple disciplines. I saw them engaging in interesting pedagogical practices, in this particular case it was learning communities, and I wanted to better understand how and why they were employing this approach to teaching. Furthermore, I wanted to know if this model could benefit the other faculty at this institution who do not often have the opportunity to work with colleagues from other fields of study. To begin, this project started with a pair of research questions. What does interdisciplinary collaboration look like in the context of a learning community? Does that learning community collaboration provide faculty with opportunities to engage in discipline-based metacognitive reflection? In order to proceed with answering the second question, metacognitive reflection is defined as a type of reflection that focuses on thinking about one's thinking ("Metacognition"). Discipline-based metacognitive reflection is simply reflection that focuses on how ways of thinking, knowing, and doing are related to and shaped by disciplinary conventions and expectations. This type of disciplinary self-awareness is also an individual's ability to recognize their own epistemological and pedagogical orientations as being shaped by the disciplines in which they have trained and worked. A secondary research question also emerged to address faculty collaboration from the student perspective. Because what we do in the classroom is always ultimately in service of our students, it is important ask whether

increases in interdisciplinary collaboration and metacognitive reflection benefit students.

It is here I must acknowledge Stanley Fish's criticisms of interdisciplinary scholarship and learning, as he claims that the goals of interdisciplinarity can be impossible to achieve. His major critique of interdisciplinarity as a whole is related to the tension between reflection and action. As he explains, a goal of interdisciplinary teaching and learning is the development of a self-consciousness that allows one to challenge the assumptions and status quo of a discipline. To interrogate this statement, Fish asks: "can you simultaneously operate within a practice and be self-consciously in touch with the conditions that enable it?" (20). His answer to this is no, as he believes that authentic critique is impossible to achieve. His reasoning for this claim is that one cannot engage in a practice while also achieving the necessary distance to reflect on that practice.[1] However, Fish is addressing methods of interdisciplinary scholarship and learning that may be

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[1] Fish's argument regarding interdisciplinary teaching and learning essentially revolves around the inability for one to achieve the distance necessary to reflect on a practice while they are engaging in that practice. He says: "once the conditions enabling a practice become the object of analytic attention (against the background of still other conditions that are themselves unavailable to conscious inspection), you are engaging in another practice (the practice of reflecting on the conditions of a practice you are not now practicing), and the practice you began to examine has been left behind, at least as something you are doing as opposed to something you are studying" (20). This seems, to me, to be unnecessary contorting of what reflection is. I am not entirely convinced that one cannot engage in a practice and simultaneously reflect upon it. If, as Carter explains, our disciplines shape our "ways of knowing and doing" inside and outside the classroom, are we ever not enmeshed in the practices of our discipline? While there is always a tension between action and reflection, I am not sure that the distinction Fish makes between the two needs to be as neat as he makes it.

better described as appropriation (a term he does, in fact, use to describe it) and he fails to account for the kind of collaborative methods utilized in learning communities.

While I acknowledge Fish's argument regarding authentic critique is valid in that attempting to achieve distance from something may be important to one's ability to reflect upon it, his claim does not account for collaborative models of interdisciplinarity. I would argue that it *is* possible for meaningful and authentic reflection on discipline to occur when faculty engage in the collaborative process of creating and implementing interdisciplinary curriculum for the purpose of a learning community. His examples of interdisciplinarity focus on the acts of individual scholars and teachers blurring disciplinary lines in order to incorporate the tools and knowledge domains of other fields into their own teaching and research. However, models of interdisciplinarity such as learning communities find their strength in the collaborative aspect—it is a model of interdisciplinarity that rejects an individual approach in favor of a collaborative one. It is this social aspect of learning communities that holds the most potential for metacognitive reflection because collaboration is an on-going, social activity that requires an instructor to continually assess their own disciplinary practices through the lens of their partner's. Scholars and teachers from different fields working together to blur disciplinary lines is different from what Fish describes as "the practice of importing into one's practice the machinery of other practices" (19) because

learning communities create an atmosphere of accountability where faculty

cannot just "import" or "appropriate" the tools of another practice. They must

consider what tools they are already bringing to the table and engage their

partners to help determine the best method for transforming those tools within the

context of the learning community.

Indeed, learning communities are complex sites of interdisciplinary

blending, where faculty must consider their epistemological and pedagogical

orientations differently than they do in their non-learning community classes.

Forming a learning community is also not the simple act of bringing together two

instructors from different fields and having them link their courses through the

registrar's office.[2] Instead, learning communities become new communities of

practice that enable faculty to alter traditional conceptions of classroom roles and

power dynamics, and to utilize the conventions and expectations of their differing

disciplines to make new spaces of learning, problem solving, and engagement.

In light of these statements, this dissertation argues that the collaboration

that occurs in the context of learning communities can best be understood and

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[2] While I argue here that "forming a learning community is also not the simple act of bringing together two instructors from different fields and having them link their courses," this is sometimes done and then called a learning community. These kinds of courses are more about providing efficient course delivery to students and do not usually focus on the synthesis of the information presented in both courses. They provide a way for students to take logically-related courses in the same semester but they do not require instructors to work together in any significant fashion and are, therefore, not generally what is being talked about in the literature regarding learning communities.

described using third generation activity theory as a framework. Activity theory, first developed by twentieth-century psychologist Lev Vygotsky, is a means of examining the mediated nature of activity. It positions a subject, object, and tools as necessary components of producing outcomes and argues that individuals (subjects) are able to accomplish goals (objects) and produce outcomes by using the appropriate tools at hand. Third generation activity theory extends activity theory's focus and represents current investigations into the nature of collective activity and the social roles and identities that can be described when analyzing how and why groups of people work together to use tools to accomplish certain ends.

Furthermore, the third generation theory distinguishes itself from previous conceptions of activity theory by focusing on the results of interacting activity systems, and this is where it finds its usefulness in relation to learning community research. Because disciplines can be considered "activity systems" with participants working to achieve goals through the use of tools available to the community, third generation theory can help describe what occurs when two activity systems meet and exchange tools for the purpose of accomplishing a new, shared goal. As the first purpose of this dissertation is to describe the collaborative practices of faculty working across disciplinary lines, third generation activity theory provides a framework and language for organizing such an inquiry into the nature of interdisciplinary work.

The second purpose of this dissertation is to address the role of discipline-based metacognitive reflection in the context of a learning community. The study conducted for this project confirms that learning communities do, in fact, create opportunities for faculty to become more self-aware of their own disciplinary conventions and how they differ from other fields within higher education; however, these opportunities for reflection are also tied to faculty being given additional opportunities to reflect upon their collaborative learning community experiences in meaningful ways outside their classrooms. While discipline-based metacognitive reflection is not a given for faculty who participate in learning communities, thoughtfully implemented and supported learning community work can make this form of reflection possible and beneficial to faculty and students who participate in this curricular model.

This dissertation is also an attempt to extend the current scholarship on learning communities by increasing the voice of composition and rhetoric researchers in the ongoing conversation about the benefits of this pedagogical model. While some scholars within composition and rhetoric have taken interest in learning communities in recent years, the majority of the research on this pedagogical model comes from those studying higher education. However, as our field continues to investigate the theoretical and pedagogical implications of interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly in light of the continued focus on writing-across-the curriculum (WAC) and writing-in-the-disciplines (WID)

pedagogy, we must ask ourselves what role learning communities play in advancing the goal of making students more competent writers and communicators across disciplinary lines. While this project is not focused on student outcomes, it is important to continually look for ways to cultivate an atmosphere that creates engaged, reflective teachers because that provides the foundation necessary for accomplishing the goals of the WAC/WID pedagogies currently employed at many institutions.

Chapter Overview

The second chapter of this dissertation provides an introduction to historical conceptions of schooling and the appearance and disappearance of learning communities throughout education history in response to the changing landscape of higher education. This background information will also provide the context needed to understand the role learning communities play socially and politically at colleges and universities across the United States. To do so, this chapter briefly explores the work of education reformers John Dewey and Alexander Meiklejohn, who have both influenced contemporary proponents of learning communities through their focus on interdisciplinary learning that prepares students to address the problems facing society. Chapter two also examines the literature within the field of composition and rhetoric that has emerged as a result of the social turn in composition. By tying together the literature on learning communities, the literature on discourse communities and

the literature on the rise of disciplinary specialization, it becomes possible to see how these areas of research can inform one another. The remainder of chapter two will then address how this study fits into the current research on learning communities and points to the ways this dissertation attempts to extend that research and make connections between the scholarship on learning communities and the interests of the composition and rhetoric community.

Chapter three discusses the methodology, methods, and theoretical lenses for this study. Included in this chapter are sections on research design, participant recruitment, data collection and reduction methods, data analysis, validity, data triangulation, limitations and threats, and contextual considerations. Finally, this chapter examines activity theory and grounded theory as the theoretical lenses for data analysis.

Chapter four presents the results of this study by reporting the analyzed data from the interviews, observations, and documents that were collected. Through interview excerpts, notes on classroom observations, and analysis of course documents, this chapter introduces the findings as they relate to each of the three participating learning communities.

Chapter five of this project provides a discussion of the data by applying the framework of third generation activity theory to the information presented in chapter four. Chapter five also discusses the implications of the data by addressing faculty's metacognitive reflective practices and examining the impact

of faculty collaboration on student learning and critical thinking. While the primary research questions address faculty collaboration, it is also necessary for this dissertation to secondarily discuss the ways in which interdisciplinary collaboration and instructor reflection shape the student experience and enhance learning both inside and outside the classroom.

The final chapter of this dissertation concludes with a presentation of recommendations for how to enhance the benefits of faculty collaboration and explains how faculty and administrators looking to increase learning community offerings on their campus can maximize their effectiveness by providing professional development opportunities for learning community faculty. An important conclusion of this study is that faculty need opportunities for professional development, processing, and debriefing their learning community experiences in order to gain the most benefits from them. Finally, this chapter offers suggestions for future research into learning communities and points to potential sites of study that could further establish the benefits of studying learning communities through the lens of composition and rhetoric research.

Definition of Terms

First, however, it is necessary to clarify some of the terminology related to learning communities in order to create a baseline understandings of the type of learning communities I am investigating in this study. The term learning community, outside the context of this study, can be used to describe a number of

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different groups that operate for the purpose of learning, collaborating, team

building, and problem solving. For example, the term could be used to describe a

group of employees who form an intentional cohort for the purpose of

collaborating on a project or gaining continuing education credentials. Learning

communities are also utilized at many higher education institutions for the

purpose of providing cohort-based professional development to faculty or

engaging faculty in the process of curriculum and standards development.

Examples of this are faculty learning communities created to address the work of

reaccreditation or engage in discipline-based professional development. These

faculty learning communities are sometimes considered service to the college or

professional development cohorts and do not include students.

At issue in this dissertation are student-centered learning communities that

exist for the purpose of teaching and learning. In Oscar Lenning, Denise Hill,

Kevin Saunders, Alisha Solan, and Andria Stoke's guide to developing

educational learning communities of all types, they provide a taxonomy of

learning communities in order to differentiate between them and clarify

terminology. The student-centered learning communities are divided into four

subgroups: curricular groups, student type, external, and course/class. Some of

these terms are seen as interchangeable with the term "learning community"

within the wider body of literature, but important differences exist when detailing

the exact meanings of these terms. Curricular groups are communities organized

around themed curriculum or are groups of students who progress through a set of courses together. Communities organized by student type may group students based on background, gender, military/veteran status, or other common denominators. External communities exist in some form outside the confines of the traditional campus setting and can include international study groups, internship groups, or service-learning communities. Finally, course/class communities utilize within-class groupings to promote collaboration and group work within a single course.

Because there are many terms in the literature to describe the many variations and nuances of possible learning communities, it is important to define the kind of learning community being discussed in this dissertation. The kind of learning communities at issue in this study fall into the curricular groups category, and more specifically are considered linked and team-taught courses, which exist to provide students with a pedagogical model that utilizes interdisciplinary collaboration to connect the content of two or more courses. As a result, this pedagogical model, according to Faith Gabelnick, is "the purposeful restructuring of the curriculum by linking or clustering courses that enroll a common cohort of students," and they are an "intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community and foster more explicit connections among students, faculty, and disciplines" (5).

For faculty, this model requires two or more instructors from different fields to engage in a curriculum development and delivery partnership. Depending on the institution, these partnerships can be suggested by administration or developed organically as instructors identify colleagues with whom they would like to work. While there are varying degrees of collaboration possible with this model, it is generally expected that, at the very least, instructors will plan their course content in order to highlight the points of intersection between their two subjects. Some instructors join their partners in the classroom and co-teach and others do so infrequently or not at all.

While there is no uniform model for contemporary learning communities, most are also characterized by co-enrolled cohorts of students who take together two or more classes from different disciplines. While team-taught courses constitute a single class that blends the content and teaching expertise of two instructors from different disciplines, they also fit within the learning community model as the instructors create the curriculum in order to emphasize the connections between their areas of specialty and encourage cross-disciplinary learning. Henceforth, this dissertation will simply use the term learning community to refer to these cohorts of students and faculty who engage in intentional and planned interdisciplinary collaboration within classroom settings.

Before discussing any of the theories and pedagogies associated with these subtopics, it is also important to first address and clarify a number of definitions

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that will be vital to the development of this conversation because different scholars working in composition and rhetoric, higher education studies, and social psychology use different terms for similar concepts and processes. These terms include discipline, disciplinarity, discourse community, and community of practice—all of which will be used throughout this dissertation to examine the complex and sometimes nebulous nature of interdisciplinary collaborations and interactions that take place within the context of learning communities.

First, it is important to separate the term "discipline" from the concept of the department as an organizing feature of higher education because, as several studies of the nature of academic discipline have shown, departments are artificially constructed units of organization that do not necessarily reflect disciplinary organization. This is particularly apparent in the fact that English departments often house literary studies, composition and rhetoric, and linguistics. While these may fall under the same department at most institutions, they do not represent the same discipline. They may be closely related but the distinction is important when identifying the ways disciplinary thinking and practice influences how faculty identify themselves in relation to those inside and outside their own fields of study.

The traditional concept of discipline, while more valuable than the term department, still sometimes denotes a more rigid understanding of organization within higher education than might be useful for this project. One might consider

biology, history, and literary studies to be disciplines, but the term still does not

account for the complexity of interaction that occurs at the edge of disciplines.

For this reason, it will be necessary to present a more complex view of discipline

within this dissertation. According to Anne Gere, Sarah Swofford, Naomi Silver,

and Melody Pugh's recent work on disciplinary identity, disciplines, like

departments, are not neatly divided categories that can be fully isolated for

analysis. Gere et. al. argue for the term "disciplinarity" to be viewed "as a

complex set of networks that extend into the borderlands between one field and

another" (257). They also describe disciplines as flexible and elastic, and these

descriptors emphasizes the idea that we must account for overlap when

considering the organization of disciplines. When analyzing disciplines for their

discourse conventions and practices, we must look at the actual activity that

occurs within these networks instead of considering only the traditional

organizational boundaries. Anne Herrington's study of chemical engineering

courses provides additional insight into this issue, as she discovered that distinct

communities can emerge within disciplines when diverse rhetorical situations

present themselves. For this reason, we must pay close attention to the

"borderlands" that Gere et al. mention, as those are the places where questions

and conflicts about the nature of discipline arise and where investigations into the

diversity of intradisciplinary communities and interdisciplinary activity must

begin.

It is also important to make the distinction between discourse communities and communities of practice, both of which are important terms within and across composition and rhetoric and higher education studies. John Swales explains discourse communities as groups that generally adhere to these six defining characteristics: they are composed of individuals who have common goals and interests, they have mechanisms for intercommunication between members, they use participatory mechanisms to provide information and feedback, they possess and uses one or more genres for communication, they have acquired a specific lexis, and have a threshold level of members with suitable content and discoursal expertise (24). He also notes that there is not necessarily a requirement to formally join a discourse community in order to participate in one. Similarly, Bruce Herzberg argues discourse communities are bound by the idea that "language use in a group is a form of social behavior" and "discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge" (Qtd in Swales 23). While Patricia Bizzell explains that the "key term 'discourse' suggests a community bound together primarily by its uses of language," she acknowledges that "geographical, socioeconomic, ethnic, [and] professional" ties can also connect discourse communities ("What is a Discourse Community?" 222). Ultimately, however, texts and language are the primary points of analysis when examining a discourse community.

The term communities of practice has been alternately proposed in higher education theory circles but is gaining popularity within composition and rhetoric, as it is has become a useful concept to a number of composition theorists and linguists including Charles Bazerman, David Russell, and Ann Johns. According to Etienne Wenger, the educational theorist who coined the term with Jean Lave, communities of practice are "created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (45) and they provide members the ability to make meaning from their experiences in the world. Wenger and Beverly Wenger-Trayner also explains that these kinds of groups can be characterized by people sharing "a concern or a passion for something they do and learn[ing] how to do it better as they interact regularly" ("Introduction to Communities of Practice"). Johns' explanations of discourse communities and communities of practice proves useful to distinguishing and providing a bridge between Swales' definition of discourse communities and Wenger's definition of communities of practice, as she says, "communities of practice are seen as complex collections of individuals who share genres, languages, values, concepts, and 'ways of being'" (51).

To further define the similarities and differences between these two concepts, Karl-Heinz Pogner argues that the aim of a discourse community is to "produce and disseminate knowledge through texts and discourses" (6) and the aim of a community of practice is to "exchange knowledge" and be "an extension of the capabilities of the members" (6). In other words, a community of practice is

effective because it enables specific problems to be solved and goals to be

accomplished through the various capabilities of the group and not just the

individual. Another key difference for Pogner is membership. Like Swales, he

believes discourse communities do not have required or formal "memberships" in

the sense that anyone can be part of a discourse community, even those who do

not know they are part of the discourse community, as long as they have

successfully adopted the community's discourse values and conventions.

Communities of practice, on the other hand, are slightly more intentional in that

members actively choose to participate in the workings of the group by self-

selecting and identifying with the specific goals of the community. Both discourse

communities and communities of practice, however, are generally characterized

by looser connections and more self-management, as they are not always

"official" organizations of people and can often be informal.

Another similarity between discourse communities and communities of

practice relates to power dynamics. Both have few real hierarchies but, according

to Pogner, do have "differences in power" between members, usually based on

length of time in the group or "ability to contribute to the discourse and

knowledge of the community (8). Finally, within academic contexts, both are

characterized by the ability to transcend the traditional institutional boundaries

and are not constricted by departmental or disciplinary organization. A

community of practice can be composed of individuals from many different

discourse communities, and through the course of working together they can come to develop group-specific discourses and conventions as it is necessary to their collaborative efforts.

      While the definitions of discourse communities and communities of practice can often overlap and contain many similarities, the key difference according to Wenger and Wenger-Trayner is the concept of "practice." They explain, "members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice" ("Introduction to Communities of Practice"). On the other hand, members of a discourse community do not necessarily have to engage in shared practice to share a discourse. Communities of practice develop and share a discourse, but not all discourse communities develop and share a practice. An example of these two concepts occurs simultaneously within many higher education settings when examining the interactions and activities of both students and faculty. The students and faculty who attend and work at institutions are part of the institutional discourse community and can draw on the knowledge and language necessary to communicate their belonging to other members of the community. However, the communities of practice students or faculty belong to are the groups in which they actively learn together and hone the practice of a certain domain in order to

accomplish shared goals. Examples of these could be the Student Government

Association, the Faculty Association, or curriculum planning teams.

Both "discourse community" and "community of practice," and the

similarities and differences between them, are important to understanding the

intersections and relationships between social theories of composition,

WAC/WID pedagogy, and activity theory. However, I will use the term

"community of practice" when discussing learning communities because it

emphasizes the organic organizations that result from actual practice while

recognizing the self-selecting and goal-oriented nature of these types of groups.

This broader term allows us to account for these areas where disciplinary

boundaries are flexible by acknowledging that work within academic contexts

cannot always be neatly categorized along departmental or even traditional

disciplinary lines. A learning community certainly fits the description of a

community of practice because there is a higher degree of self-selection for

participating members and they are "complex collections of individuals who share

genres, languages, values, concepts, and 'ways of being'" (Johns 51) that are

practice oriented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the historical background of learning communities, and then examines existing scholarship surrounding how learning communities can achieve institutional goals and benefit students. This chapter also address the trends in composition and rhetoric studies that can be usefully connected to investigations into learning communities.

Education Reform and Contemporary Learning Communities

Learning communities may be a growing pedagogical approach to instructional delivery, but they have become increasingly popular because they represent a return to interdisciplinary learning that characterized historical forms of education. Historians of both education and composition and rhetoric, including Robert Connors, Thomas Miller, and David Russell have provided ample evidence of the interdisciplinary and cohort-based nature of early education models. From ancient Greece through much of the 19th century, there were no segregated departments that isolated knowledge learned in one area from another. Instead, cohorts of students were guided through curriculum that provided a scaffolding of knowledge and emphasized the connections between knowledge across the curriculum. Going back as far as Plato, we have evidence that school "subjects" were broadly conceived to allow students to establish and build on foundational knowledge that applied to a wide range of topics. Young cohorts of students were taught grammar, logic, and rhetoric, the three areas of study

referred to as the trivium, and after building that base of knowledge, they moved on to arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, or the quadrivium.

The cohort model is particularly important for modern learning communities because a basic premise of the model is that students learn better when they work within intentional cohorts that progress through a curriculum together. Proponents of learning communities argue that having the same group of students take more than one course together allows them to more successfully engage in reflection and discussion inside and outside the classroom because their peers are receiving the same cross-disciplinary curriculum.

This cohort-based model of education diminished by the 19th century for a number of reasons. The diversification of American colleges and universities posed challenges to these pedagogical models, as the old models didn't necessarily work once education was no longer homogenous and elitist. As diverse populations gained access to higher education, it became harder to sustain the small cohort model because institutions began to see increases in the diversity of linguistic background, programs of study, and scheduling needs. However, new models have not done much to help realize the benefits of interdisciplinary learning. Instead, they have further encouraged a separation between disciplines, as fields of study have attempted to further specialize in an effort to distinguish themselves.

A second reason for the decline of cohort-based education was the adoption of German model of higher education. Russell's work in particular addresses the currently fragmented nature of higher education as a product of this model, which privileged research and specialization above all else. These developments in faculty research expectations largely contributed to the way this model influenced the American university system and lead to distinct and separate disciplines that rarely collaborated. Russell further argues that this fragmentation is a primary cause of the decline of rhetoric as a course of study, which, in turn, led to a view of writing as general and existing outside the specialized knowledge of the disciplines. The resurgence of learning communities within higher education, in some respects, represents an attempt to return to these cohort-based models that remove the strict boundaries of specialization within the academy. The new focus on learning communities is a return to the belief that all knowledge is interconnected, and students and faculty alike benefit from pedagogical models that promote collaboration and interdisciplinary connections. In addition, the diversity of American higher education is viewed as a positive component of learning community implementation, as it creates educational spaces where individuals from a variety of backgrounds can work together and learn from one another.

Because of these changes to the structure of higher education, modern learning communities owe a great deal to education reformers of the early 20th

century, including John Dewey and Alexander Meiklejohn, who both sought to promote schooling as a social, democratic endeavor that should prepare students to be engaged citizens who challenge the status quo. They were also critical of the German model of higher education, and these critiques "created internal pressure for learning communities to regain prominence at the turn of the 20th century" (Fink and Inkelas 5). Both men saw the reform of education as one of the most important aspects of creating social change. Research on modern learning communities draws on this tradition by focusing on the social and political implications of interdisciplinary collaboration and the benefits of cohort-style education for students from marginalized populations. As a result, situating learning communities in their historical context requires an understanding of the progressive era theory and practice that has inspired the recent surge of modern learning communities.

According to education historians Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner Jr., Dewey was a prominent member of the liberal branch of progressive educators in the 19the century. As a progressive liberal, his views on the nature and purpose of education greatly differed from the progressive conservative view. These differences were both philosophical and pedagogical. The views of Dewey and his fellow progressive liberals would be the strain of progressive education that has come to influence the contemporary learning community movement.

As a progressive liberal, Dewey's influence is especially visible in the current research on learning communities even though his work did not directly address this particular model of teaching and learning. Dewey argued that the institution of education must be radically re-conceptualized so that there is greater value placed on critical inquiry, equality, and a promotion of the skills necessary to participate in democratic life. On the other hand, conservatives held to a utilitarian view of education. Dewey believed it was harmful to perpetuate the view that school was a place for students to gain a basic knowledge of core subjects and then use that knowledge to find a job suited to their abilities. To conceive of education in this way was to ignore the important social and democratic role of the school, where he argued students needed to be prepared for active citizenship.

In order to be foster this active citizenship, Dewey believed that schooling needed to mirror the ideal society at large and create an atmosphere that promoted collaboration, inquiry, knowledge connections, active participation, and equality. In *The School and Society*, Dewey argues that the function of schooling is social, and, as a result, the pedagogical practices employed to teach and prepare students must also be social. Unfortunately, as Dewey explains, "the radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is because just this element of common and productive activity is absent...In the schoolroom the motive and the cement of social organization are alike wanting" (*The School and*

Society 14). In other words, Dewey believed that the nature of schooling did not

reflect or prepare students for the kind of collaboration and problem solving that

is necessary for the ongoing maintenance of social institutions. Similarly, in *My*

Pedagogic Creed, he argues that "much of present education fails because it

neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life" (9).

This idea—the concept of the school as a form of community life—was radical

because it challenged the view of schooling as an individual endeavor that simply

trained students. He further reinforces this idea in *Democracy and Education*, and

claims that *all* students need to be prepared for participation in civic life and not

just upper class students who have historically had the privilege of shaping public

discourse and social institutions.

Dewey's theories about the purpose of education were foundational to his

philosophy; however, he was first and foremost a practitioner, and much of his

work focuses on the pedagogical implications related to how students learn and

how classrooms should operate. Dewey believed that the traditional method of

schooling was failing students because it lacked at its core a basic understanding

of both the way students learn and the way they construct knowledge. The

traditional method of teaching posited students as passive learners who were

meant to absorb the knowledge imparted by teachers and textbooks. In *Learning*

Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education, Barbara Leigh Smith, Jean

McGregor, Roberta Matthews, and Faith Gabelnick refer to Dewey's philosophy

of teaching as one of "shared inquiry" (26), a concept rooted in the belief that the prior experiences students have should be acknowledged and utilized as part of the knowledge making process of education.

Dewey also criticized the way schools positioned the student-teacher relationship, as he believed that they reinforced a student-teacher relationship that was grounded in authoritarianism (Reese 2). Dewey found these epistemological beliefs and disciplinary practices to be highly problematic as they did not reflect the true nature of knowledge and learning; he believed that knowledge was created through social customs and attitudes and that through learning, students contributed to knowledge making. Dewey reasoned that giving students the opportunity to learn a concept, test it in action, and then reflect on the outcomes was a vital component of shaping engaged, self-reliant students who could take knowledge learned in multiple areas and apply it where necessary. Without that opportunity for action and reflection, students could not become critical thinkers and engaged learners; they remained passive and dependent on an authority figure to transfer knowledge. Dewey firmly believed that traditional pedagogy left no room for students to question sanctioned knowledge, learn through personal discovery, learn about things that interested them, or make connections between classroom knowledge and the various ways it could be used outside the school setting. As a result, he proposed curriculum that better served what he believed to be the true nature of student learning—that students were active learners who

gained the most from experiential, interdisciplinary learning that allowed them a sense of agency in their education.

While Dewey was mainly concerned with primary education, Alexander Meiklejohn focused on the necessity for democratic forms of education within institutions of higher education. Like Dewey, Meiklejohn believed that schooling could actually shape society and not just be a reflection of it. As an idealist, he expressed strong views on education's ability to create a society that valued freedom, justice, and democracy. He also rejected philosophers and political thinkers like Locke who favored individualism because he believed that respect for communal obligations was the foundation of the ideal society (Lewis 70). Education, then, was a place to build community and teach students to "think together" for the greater good of society. As Adam Nelson explains, Meiklejohn wanted students to be able to "deliberate reasonably and cooperatively about issues of common public concern" (333). Education, as a thoroughly social endeavor, must be structured to reduce individualism and segregated thinking. In *Education Between Two Worlds,* Meiklejohn argues "teachers and pupils are not isolated individuals" (279). This, he believed, meant that teaching and learning were social activities that had profound effects on the way society as a whole operated.

Just as he believed people did not operate independently of their social context, Meiklejohn also believed that knowledge domains did not exist

independently of one another. In *The Liberal College,* he argues that the purpose

of a liberal education is to "understand human endeavors not in their isolation but

in their relations to one another and to the total experience which we call the life

of our people" (38). For this reason, he believed it was important for liberal arts

institutions to provide students with curriculum that emphasized the knowledge

connections between courses and returned to the earlier forms of education, as

"the splitting up of knowledge and of life into separate compartments,—sciences,

arts, trades, professions—this has sundered many of the connections of earlier

days" (62). To address this, he proposed a freshman course that introduced ethics,

logic, history, economics, law, and government as a means of introducing

students to "humanistic sciences" and the knowledge relationships between these

various areas of study. He later describes his curriculum proposal for the rest of a

four-year course of study as "one continuous intellectual inquiry" (143).

The realization of these curricular goals came about in 1927 when

Meiklejohn created the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin. This

experimental cohort would, in some respects, later serve as inspiration for modern

learning communities that looked to increase interdisciplinary, liberal arts studies.

Within the cohort, students were given a great deal of freedom, and disciplinary

divisions were almost entirely abolished. The goal was to use interdisciplinary

learning, with a focus on Classical thinkers and their works, to help students

understand and address the problems of modern life. The Experimental College

eventually closed after five years, but the values of this radical pedagogical approach to teaching and learning would live on as formal and informal learning community programs developed at more institutions across the country. One of Meiklejohn's students, Joseph Tussman, created a learning community at UC Berkley in 1965 that attempted to mirror the effective components of Meiklejohn's experimental college, and this learning community focused on providing an interdisciplinary curriculum through writing-intensive, team-taught courses. The community disbanded after several years, however, because, as Tussman believed, the model was ultimately incompatible with the research-center nature of the German higher education model (Smith et al. 42).

As practices in undergraduate education have come into focus on a national level, thanks in part to a renewed interest in the works of Dewey and Meiklejohn, a number of policy organizations have issued reports in the last several decades on objectives for the undergraduate level. The National Institute of Education's 1984 report called for the organization of smaller learning communities and increased opportunities for student and faculty interaction (NIE). Similarly, in the 1997 report *Returning to our roots: The student experience,* the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities advocated for the creation of learning communities to promote more engaging learning spaces in the face of increasing college enrollments. These

reports have all helped provide justification for increasing learning communities as a teaching and learning model.

Perhaps the most important development in modern learning community history was the creation of the Washington Center, which Evergreen State College opened in response to these increasing demands for higher education reform. In 1985, the center created a program to oversee the implementation and research of learning communities. Soon after, the center became a national resource for institutions in need of support for new learning community programs and a leader in learning community research initiatives. There was a strong focus at this time on collecting data that justified and validated the learning community model, and, for this reason, there have been numerous studies on the learning community model as it related to student achievement, retention, and passing rates.

Most of the research on the effectiveness of learning communities, produced since the opening of the Washington Center, has documented a trend of positive outcomes for students and teachers across disciplines and education levels. According to Terry Myers Zawacki and Ashley Williams, most of this research focuses on student development and outcomes. They argue, "typical assessment criteria for student success and satisfaction in learning communities may include, for example, persistence, course completion, cognitive development, appreciation of diversity, involvement in the campus and wider community, ability to work in groups, and intellectual focus" (128). Most of the major studies

on learning communities have concluded that students benefit greatly from a cohort-style education because it allows students the opportunity to work more closely with other students and faculty, and it leads to levels of engagement that are necessary for achieving statistical markers of success like passing and retention rates (Pascarella & Terenzini). This is especially true for first-year students from so-called "non-traditional" backgrounds because the cohort functions as a built-in support system for navigating the rigors of college-level work (Rocconi).

However, learning communities serve a purpose beyond increasing retention and passing rates and are also being discussed in terms of their role in large-scale educational changes that reflect the thinking of Dewey and Meiklejohn. At the Washington Center's inaugural learning community conference in 1985, Patrick Hill argued that learning communities represent part of the solution to reforming higher education, as he explained,

> learning communities [are] responding [to] the lack of relationship or coherence among most of the courses taken by the student outside his or her major. The individual, isolated course, standing on its own and too often created out of the research interests of the professor, deprives the students and the teacher of the widest system of coherent curricular support which would relate the fragmented disciplines to each other and

reinforce the significance of what is being taught. ("The Rationale for

Learning Communities")

As the Washington Center has grown, it has kept Hill's remarks at the forefront, and according to their website, they believe it is necessary to think of learning communities as more than just a curricular reform or a means of retaining individual students. Instead, they must also be valued for their ability to make large-scale educational reforms and redefine the way students learn and instructors teach.

This conception of learning communities also reflects the work of Dewey and Meiklejohn by promoting learning communities as a pedagogical model that builds community and fosters inclusiveness within higher education, as learning communities represent a space where students and faculty can work together to construct knowledge and meaning in an increasingly global and interdisciplinary world. In her 1998 speech to the National Conference on Higher Education, Patricia Cross acknowledged the importance of this social view of knowledge when she said, "education, therefore, should be based in learning communities where teachers and students act interdependently to construct meaning and understanding" ("What Do We Know"). The importance of this social view of knowledge and learning has been further confirmed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), whose 2002 report called on institutions to provide more multidisciplinary contexts for learning, and

specifically highlighted learning communities as a strategy for accomplishing that goal. Laura Rendon similarly calls on community colleges to fulfill "the promise of access and opportunity" by specifically working to foster relationship-centered pedagogies that provide deeper connections between faculty and students in order to enhance learning communities for "non-traditional" students. Similarly, The Washington Center's Emily Lardner and Gilles Malnarich argue that learning communities must have "an agenda for educational equity," which they explain is a response to the AACU 2007 report, *College Learning in the New Global Century*. In that report, the AACU argues all students "will need wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary knowledge, higher-level skills, an active sense of personal and social responsibility, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge to complex problems" (11). The most significant discussions of learning communities in the last two decades go beyond the success of individual students and look at education practices as a whole with the goal of reviving interdisciplinary collaboration, community, and democracy.

The Social Turn in Composition

The next section of this chapter examines the social turn in composition. As trends in higher education during the latter part of the twentieth century highlighted the importance of the social context of learning, the field of composition studies was similarly turning its attention to the way writing is socially motivated and constructed. It was this social turn that solidified the

values of social epistemicism within the composition classroom and led to cross-disciplinary pedagogies such as writing-in-the-disciplines and writing-across-the-curriculum. While the previous section focused on the developments in education theory and practice that have informed learning community trends, the trends in composition and rhetoric studies that occurred alongside these reforms in higher education are important to understand as well because they have shaped our field's understanding of disciplinarity, discourse communities, and broader communities of practice. As I am first and foremost interested in the ways composition and rhetoric studies can contribute to and inform discussions of learning community collaboration and disciplinary ways of knowing and doing, this section uses the social turn in composition as a means of connecting the literature on learning communities to the interests of composition and rhetoric studies.

In his book *Composition-Rhetoric*, Robert Connors points to 1963 as the "fulcrum" year when a rhetorical consciousness returned to the field of composition. He specifically cites the 1963 CCCC as the point when there was a noticeable scholarly focus on rhetoric as it related to composition pedagogy. James Berlin, in *Rhetoric and Reality*, similarly marks the early 1960s as the return of a "new rhetoric," which invigorated the field and paved the way for scholarship and research that would begin to "legitimize" the field. This renewal of a rhetorical consciousness was a move that would eventually result in a focus

on what Berlin calls transactional rhetoric, which serves as the underlying

framework for social theories and pedagogies of composition.

Prior to the focus on transactional rhetoric, the objective view of rhetoric

dominated understandings of speech, writing, and knowledge making and

acquisition. The objective view relied on a positivist epistemology that positioned

reality outside of language and within the material world. It did not view language

as a way of making and shaping meaning, as language was considered to be a tool

for transmitting meaning that had already been established through observation of

the natural world. According to Berlin, this view "demands that the audience be

as 'objective' as the writer; both shed personal and social concerns in the interests

of unobstructed perception of empirical reality" ("Contemporary Composition:

The Major Pedagogical Theories" 266).

The ideas that gave rise to the social turn in composition pedagogy may

have emerged in the 1960s and 70s, but according to Joseph Harris, they

flourished in the mid-80s when social constructionists, as Harris calls them, began

to more heavily critique the objective and subjective rhetorics that preceded them.

While the dominant view of language within objective rhetorics was that it existed

to convey the world outside language— that there a truth existed prior to language

and it was the job of a speaker or writer to use language to accurately convey that

truth—subjective rhetorics located truth within the individual. For subjectivists,

truth may transcend the material world, but as Berlin notes, again in *Rhetoric and*

Reality, it "must still be discovered by the individual in a private act" (12).

Interactions between individuals, then, are seen as a way of communicating truth

to one another. Both of these views of rhetoric, objective and subjective, were

challenged as researchers began to take an interest in the concept of cognition and

the ways people produce written texts.

This development in the field of composition studies became possible as

compositions researchers turned to sociolinguistics and social psychology in an

effort to help describe the development of language and its use within different

communities. Berlin further explains that the social turn in composition studies

was partly the result of the cognitive process research from prominent scholars,

including Linda Flower and John Hayes, Nancy Sommers, Sondra Perl, and

Patricia Bizzell. These foundational studies, although they initially sought to,

according to Bizzell, "discover writing processes that are so fundamental as to be

universal" ("Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" 389), led to questions of

social context, environment, and the conventions of speech and writing

acquisition.

Attempting to examine the cognitive processes of writers ultimately

spurred questions about the importance of social context and the prevalence of a

writer's attention to the rhetorical situation. In "Cognition, Convention, and

Certainty" Bizzell describes the difference between "inner-directed theory" and

"outer-directed theory." While inner-directed theorists look for innate mental

structures that dictated writing and language development, outer-directed theorists

believe that thinking and language can never be separated from the social factors

that influence them. These different views can be compared to some of the

fundamental differences between Piaget and Vygotsky, as Piaget looked to innate

structural processes and Vygotsky claimed social context to be the starting point

of all development. Bizzell, although she acknowledges some of the important

contributions of inner-directed theories, favors outer-directed theories, and, as a

result, she argues "composition studies should focus upon practice within

interpretive communities—exactly how conventions work in the world and how

they are transmitted" (409).

This focus on interpretive communities and the inherently social nature of

language and knowledge would lead to the development of new avenues of

inquiry and pedagogical models that changed writing instruction in higher

education. These developments included research on discourse communities,

genre, writing-in-the-disciplines, and writing-across-the-curriculum, all of which

have the potential to contribute to current investigations into the nature and

usefulness of learning communities.

Research and Trends that Emerged from the Social Turn

The social turn in composition emphasized the importance of recognizing

how conventions vary across communities, and that the academic community

itself contains a number of discourses that are shaped by the epistemological and

pedagogical concerns of the various disciplines. As a result, research into

discourse communities and WAC/WID approaches emerged to address the

various writing and communication needs of increasingly diverse institutions.

Pioneers of the WAC/WID movement drew largely on Kenneth Bruffee's

1984 article "Collaboration and Conversation of Mankind," where he traces the

origins of collaborative learning to British secondary schools in the 1950s and

60s. Bruffee then examines the implications of socially constructed knowledge

and argues students often need to adapt and learn how to participate in the kind of

conversations at the center of the college classroom. As this concept made its way

to the United States in the 80s, it was used to address the "literacy crisis" that

emerged in the 70s. According to Bruffee, "the common denominator among both

the poorly prepared and the seemingly well-prepared was that…all these students

seemed to have difficulty adapting to the traditional or 'normal' conventions of

the college classroom" (417). One important factor in addressing this issue is

"understand[ing] how knowledge is established and maintained in the 'normal'

discourse' of communities of knowledgeable peers" (421). In other words,

success in higher education, where there exists specific expectations for what

constitutes knowledge and the development and communication of that

knowledge, requires an ability to adapt to the conversational environment of

college. On the other hand, difficulty stems, in part, from an inability to adapt to

these conventions of higher education.

Along with Bruffee, other early social constructionists argued that these conventions and expectations of higher education and disciplinary learning are not inherent, static structures. Instead, they are fluid, changing, and constantly being renegotiated by the myriad individuals who collectively participate in and maintain these communities. David Bartholomae's scholarship from the 1980s and 90s affirms Bruffee's claims and extends his arguments by explicitly focusing on the importance of students learning how to adapt to and participate in what he calls various academic discourses. In his 1986 article, "Inventing the University," Bartholomae explains higher education as a system of multiple discourse communities that have "peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing" (4). As a result, one of the primary tasks for students is to "learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes" (4). Similarly, in Bizzell's article "Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition Studies," published the same year as Bartholomae's article, she argues students must master academic discourse in order to successfully participate in higher education. This mastery of discourse, she says, is the result of a student's socialization into the "ways" of different academic communities. Bartholomae and Bizzell's explanations of academic discourse communities have paved the way for a deeper understanding of how discourse communities function within higher education and control the production and distribution of disciplinary knowledge.

Once the field began to better understand and acknowledge the existence of discourse communities through the work of scholars such as Bruffee, Bartholomae, and Bizzell, and others, new questions emerged to further develop these theories. Where did these academic discourse communities come from? How does their existence shape the way knowledge is constructed and disseminated within the context of higher education? How does this knowledge influence the existence and development of first-year composition courses? These questions led to the publication of more research on discourse communities, WAC/WID, and genre studies.

As stated earlier in this chapter, a number of histories on composition and rhetoric as a field have answered the question of why increasingly specialized discourse communities within higher education emerged in the nineteenth century. As mechanisms for tenure and promotion began to revolve around research accomplishment, scholars looked for ways to specialize and distinguish themselves. This greatly contributed to institutional segregation of knowledge domains and course content and isolated scholars from those outside their immediate areas of interest and specialization.

This segregation has had important implications for the development of disciplinary knowledge construction and dissemination, and questions surrounding this issue have been addressed at length by those working in genre studies and discourse analysis. Herrington's 1985 study on writing contexts in

chemical engineering courses examines disciplinary knowledge and communication by describing the diverse social roles and purposes for writing within a single discipline—the chemical engineering department. Not only does the chemical engineering department have particular communication needs and values, but Herrington argues that distinct communities can develop even within single disciplines. According to Herrington, this diversity of and within academic discourse communities means we need to "rethink some of our assumptions about the monolithic nature of writing in academic settings" (354).

Similarly, Charles Bazerman's 1988 study of scientific writing, *Shaping Written Knowledge*, examines the ways scientists have been shaped by the discourse conventions of their fields and how changes within the genre of experimental articles have deeper epistemological implications. In other words, different academic disciplines have different needs and values, and those needs and values are intricately connected to the forms of writing and communication they privilege. Bazerman argues:

> Getting the words right is more than a fine tuning of grace and
> clarity; it is defining the entire enterprise. And getting the words
> right depends not just on an individual's choice. The words are
> shaped by the discipline—in its communally developed linguistics
> resources and expectations; in its literature; in its active procedures
> of reading, evaluating, and using texts; in its structured interactions

between writer and reader. The words arise out of the activity,

procedures, and relationships within the community. (47)

Both Herrington and Bazerman's research confirmed that disciplinary content and

domain knowledge are inseparable from the forms of writing and communication

used to disseminate that knowledge. As both of their studies indicate, the

communities in question are constantly defining and redefining their communal

identities through the texts they produce.

Unfortunately, as David Russell points out in *Writing in the Academic*

Disciplines, 1870-1990, the trend of disciplinary specialization and the rise of

general composition courses over the last century have discouraged scholars in

different fields from viewing their disciplines as discourse communities with

particular writing and communication conventions. It is not uncommon to hear

faculty outside first-year writing programs wonder why students do not write well

in their courses or assume the freshman composition course will prepare students

for all aspects of writing in their academic careers. Thus, the prevalence of

general composition strengthens the idea for many faculty that writing is *not*

highly context-bound and there are simply "good" and "bad" features of writing

that a freshman composition course can teach students to use or avoid. Because of

this belief, many scholars view writing and discourse as something that can be

separated from the content knowledge of their fields. As scholars become more

isolated from the work of their colleagues in other disciplines, their own field's

discourse conventions become more invisible, and so too do their processes of learning to operate within these disciplinary discourses. Over time, this only continues to reinforce the problematic idea that first-year composition should be the only site of writing instruction in higher education.

As a result, it can be difficult to convince faculty outside of composition and rhetoric to endorse WID approaches to teaching disciplinary discourse because of what Russell calls "the myth of transience." Russell argues that for many scholars, "writing seemed to be independent of content knowledge," and this belief "tended to marginalize writing instruction and reinforce the myth of transience by masking the complexities of the task" (7). The result of this "myth of transience" has been to relegate writing instruction to a temporary course of study that lasts for, at most, one academic year. Thus, according to the popular belief of the last century and a half, once students learn to write, they can then move on to the business of learning the content knowledge of a particular field.

In "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines," Michael Carter builds on Russell's work by attempting to dispel this myth and explaining the real process by which scholars enter into their discourse communities. Carter argues that most faculty members learn to write in their disciplines "by a process of slow acculturation through various apprenticeship discourses." Thus, they are unable to see "writing itself is specific to the discipline" (385). This inability to see writing as a context specific activity leads to what Carter calls the "myth of

transparency." Because most scholars experience a slow, gradual assimilation into the writing conventions of their discourse communities, the process of learning to write and communicate often appears invisible. Pedagogically speaking, then, the primary implication of the WAC/WID movement is that the process of learning to write does not end when a student leaves a first year writing course. Instead, faculty in all disciplines must help their students acclimate to the conventions of their own discourse communities.

As research on discourse communities changed the way we view the development of texts and negotiation of meaning within the various disciplines, WAC/WID recognized the need to emphasize writing instruction at all levels of a student's higher education journey—not just at the first-year writing level. Thus, the WAC/WID approach to composition pedagogy means faculty in all communities of practice are charged with guiding and mentoring their students through the process of learning the specialized conventions of their fields. Because learning to write and communicate within an academic discourse community cannot be separated from disciplinary content knowledge, WID is an approach to composition that emphasizes the different ways of knowing and communicating that occur in the various academic disciplines. As a philosophy of composition and communication, it recognizes that the disciplines are not just marked by differences in content; they are also marked by different epistemological foundations that guide conceptions of writing and

communication. Instead of positioning writing as a general skill that exists outside all discourse communities, the WID movement argues that writing must be taught as a context-bound activity that shapes and is shaped by the conventions, values, and epistemological concerns of a particular discourse community.

While this view of writing as general and transparent still dominates higher education, the goal of the WAC/WID movement is to change this view by encouraging what Bazerman calls "rhetorical self-consciousness." The more scholars outside composition and rhetoric become more self-aware of their discipline's conventions, the more they will be able to help students join their discourse communities and, as Bartholomae suggests, "try on a number of voices and interpretive schemes" (4). Bazerman also notes that there are limits to this because asking any scholar to "hold up every statement for rhetorical examination" is "an unrealistic demand" (331). However, faculty across all disciplines could benefit from increased opportunities for reflective activities that focus on the nature of disciplinary identity and rhetorical competency within their discourse communities.

Because faculty outside the field of composition and rhetoric often feel unprepared to provide writing instruction, or do not often have structured opportunities to reflect on what it means to write and communicate within the context of their discipline, the development of WAC/WID programs has also led to the publication of a number of books aimed at helping faculty from all

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disciplines implement, teach, and comment on student writing in their classrooms. An early guide to teaching writing was Barbara Walvoord's *Helping Students Write Well*. In this book, Walvoord explains to faculty how to become a "coach" to guide students through the writing process. One suggestion she makes is that faculty refer to writing assignments by their genre-based names, such as reviews or essays instead of saying "paper." This, Walvoord explains, helps students see their writing as "recognized forms of real writing." The rest of the book provides detailed instructions for how to help students write in a variety of genres, including lab reports, researched essays, journals, and more. John Bean's more recent guide walks faculty through the processes of helping students to read critically, how to design writing assignments, and how to teach disciplinary conventions. He argues that faculty across disciplines must challenge students to think rhetorically by considering audience, purpose, and genre because it enables them to "develop a conceptual view of writing that has lifelong usefulness in any communicative context" (40).

Similar discipline-specific books have emerged to help faculty develop methods for teaching students to think, read, and write within their communities. In "Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines," Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki emphasize the importance of creating a culture of writing within all academic disciplines in order to better accomplish the goals of WAC/WID. According to their surveys and interviews, most faculty define the general

characteristics of academic writing in similar ways; however, they specify

additional disciplinary conventions that reflect the special concerns and practices

of their fields. Thaiss and Zawacki also acknowledge that disciplines and

departments are not interchangeable words because disciplines are much more

fluid groups that cannot be wholly contained by the more artificial departmental

boundaries. Student responses to Thaiss and Zawacki also indicate that faculty

feedback on writing is one of the most important elements in their development as

a thinker and communicator within their advanced coursework, which indicates

that the ability for faculty to identify, explain, and comment on the ways student

do or not adhere to disciplinary conventions plays a vital role in helping students

learn and adapt.

Extending the Current Research

　　　　Research into learning communities has generally focused on the student

experience and the benefits these types of learning environments provide for first-

year students, but there is also a growing body of scholarship that suggests

academic learning community participation can benefit instructors as well.

According to Maria Hesse and Marybeth Mason, some of the research on faculty

benefits include innovations in technology use, renewed senses of community and

collegiality, and a boosts in morale. Zawacki and Williams similarly report that

research into faculty benefits tends to focus on "factors such as whether the

program stimulates teaching and curriculum improvement both within and beyond

the LC program, degree of collaborative effort, willingness to continue teaching in the program, and so on" (128). What is missing, however, are more investigations of learning communities from the perspective of the field of composition and rhetoric that explore the disciplinary and discourse community-related implications of creating these kinds of learning environments. While Zawacki and Williams are approaching learning community research through the lens of WAC pedagogy, they are primarily interested in student work and assessment. Other investigations of learning communities from the perspective of composition and rhetoric, including Greg Barnhisel, Evan Stoddard, and Jennifer Gorman's 2012 study on incorporating process-pedagogy into learning community writing components, tend to focus solely on student outcomes instead of looking at the implications of faculty participation.

As a result, this study seeks to extend the recent work on faculty participation and examine what collaborative processes are actually at work when faculty participate in learning communities and whether or not that collaboration can provide opportunities for disciplinary self-awareness and reflection. This study only serves as a starting point for describing the various ways learning community faculty collaborate and reflect, and this study cannot provide a comprehensive look at the benefits faculty receive from learning community participation or explain the full extent of the impact on student success or student writing. My goal is to represent a starting point for examining interdisciplinary

collaboration in the context of learning communities and explore disciplinary reflection and self-awareness as a potential outcome for faculty members who participate in a curricular model that requires them to integrate their disciplinary "ways of knowing and doing" with ones from other fields of study.

The reason learning communities should be of particular interest to the field of composition and rhetoric is because they represent collaboration between two or more academic discourse communities, and as WID research indicates, academic discourse communities have trended toward isolation in the last century. Because disciplines have only further segregated and specialized since then, WID-focused studies have primarily examined the ways different academic discourse communities interact internally—the ways engineers problem solve and communicate, or the way historians have established ways of thinking and writing. Rarely, though, has WID research looked into the ways members of different academic discourse communities interact with one another in the few collaborative spaces currently available at most institutions. For this reason, it is important to investigate the ways learning community participation might help faculty develop a disciplinary self-awareness that enables them to convey to their students the important discourse conventions of their fields.

Chapter 3: Methods, Methodology, and Theory

This chapter provides an overview of the methods, methodology, and theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation. First, I provide an overview of the study design, participant recruitment, the methods used to collect data on the learning communities, the validity and reliability of data, contextual factors influencing the research site, and potential threats to the study. The remainder of the chapter introduces activity theory and grounded theory as the theoretical lenses through which the data was analyzed.

Because the study involved human subjects, IRB approval was obtained from the study site to ensure the research was in compliance with institutional goals to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects, promote ethical research practices, and conform to federal regulations for human subject research ("Regulations"). The study went through an expedited review to identify the research parameters, data collection, potential risks to participants, measures for maintaining participant confidentiality, and informed consent procedures for recruiting participants.

<u>Study Design and Methodology</u>

This study uses qualitative case study methods to investigate the nature of collaboration between faculty who teach in learning communities at the research site. It also seeks to determine if the collaborative practices identified provide opportunities for instructors to engage in discipline-based metacognitive

reflection. As Joseph Maxwell explains in *Qualitative Research Design,* it is important to understand "the strengths, limitations, and consequences" of research design," and, in an attempt to "make it explicit," (3) as Maxwell advises, this section and the ones that follow attempt to explain the choices made in study design and the resulting implications of those choices.

First, a qualitative case study design was chosen because it allowed for an investigation into the specific cases of learning community implementation at the research site and would make it possible to provide a snapshot of these pedagogical practices as they exist in their unstructured form. "Unstructured" is defined, in this case, by a lack of institutional programming for learning communities at the research site, as faculty who engage in learning communities do so voluntarily and do not rely on institutional guidelines, policies, or programs that are specific to learning communities for creating and implementing these courses. The qualitative case study approach provides the best opportunity to examine the details of faculty collaboration in multiple forms, through interviews and observations.

As Robert Yin explains in *Case Study Research: Design and Methods,* a researcher should consider a case study design when they are asking "how" a phenomenon occurs instead of "why." This kind of design is also important to consider when the phenomenon cannot be separated from its context and the researcher is not interested in manipulating any variables. A case study approach

can also be useful when a researcher is working from a constructivist point of view. In further effort to make the implications of this research design explicit, it is important to explain that this study is approaching the phenomenon in question from a constructivist stance. This concept is addressed in chapter two as it relates to the social turn in composition, but the implications of a constructivist viewpoint extend into the area of research design as well. A study operating from a constructivist perspective is one that acknowledges reality is socially created and that it is impossible for pure objectivity to exist, as study participants and researchers alike can never fully remove themselves from the context and experiences that shape their understanding of reality. When research questions, like the one in this study, are working from this premise, a case study design allows the researcher to acknowledge the ways study participants and researchers construct meaning through their experiences and discourses. The constructivist viewpoint does not, however, entirely reject the idea that a researcher can move toward objectivity by systematically attempting to reduce bias and identifying and mitigating potential threats to reliability and validity.

This study meets the criteria for a case study design established by Yin first because the research questions for this project are asking "how" questions. How do faculty collaborate in the interdisciplinary context of the learning community and how, if at all, do these collaborative practices affect discipline-based metacognitive reflection? The case study design is also the necessary

choice for this project because I am not interested in changing or manipulating any of the variables associated with the phenomenon in question and I believe that the context surrounding the participants plays an integral role in understanding the findings and proving an answer to these "how" questions. A primary goal of this study is to allow the study participants to tell their stories and discuss their learning community experiences in an effort to gain a better understanding of how these experiences inform and are informed by their reflective practices.

Yin also examines a number of case study types and outlines the more specific aims of each type. Two kinds that he examines, descriptive and explanatory, were chosen for this study because they were the natural fit for the research questions. A descriptive case study is one that describes the phenomenon and takes into account the context in which it occurs, and an explanatory case study is one that seeks to understand the links, if any, between the actions and outcomes the researcher might be observing. In this case study, the first research question (how do faculty collaborate?) necessitates a descriptive approach because the goal of answering that question is to put language to an already occurring activity—the goal is not to determine *why* faculty collaborate the way they do it is simply to describe *how* they do it. The second research question (how does collaboration affect reflection?) necessitates an explanatory approach because the goal of answering that question is to determine if there is any link

between the way participants collaborate inside and outside the classroom and the kind of metacognitive reflective practices in which they might engage.

The mixed methods approach to data collection was necessary in order to address the research questions because no one method of data collection could account for the multiple viewpoints, experiences, actions, and outcomes that constitute the phenomenon under investigation. For example, in *Shaping Written Knowledge,* Bazerman argues that, when investigating how individuals conceive of their discipline's activity must allow subjects to explain those conceptions because "understanding what people think they are doing gives insight into how they use words to accomplish those things" (4). This is why interviews were a necessary method of data collection—for this study to be able to describe the collaborative practices of the faculty, the participants needed to be able to provide their own explanation of those activities. It was also necessary to interview the participants because there were a number of details and stories about their collaboration that could not be observed. All of the study participants have been working together for months, and in some cases years, before the start of the study. For this reason, interviews were the only way to gather the information about their partnerships that could not be observed in the classroom or seen in their course documents.

However, observation and document analysis were also necessary data collection methods because, returning to Bazerman's words, it was important to

also determine how the study participants used words to accomplish what they thought they were accomplishing. This was the primary justification for collecting and analyzing course documents. If the instructors made statements in the interviews that indicated they *thought* they were accomplishing certain things through their collaboration, did the course documents they created support those statements? Collecting course documents was necessary in order to analyze the potential difference between what instructors say they do (the interviews) and what they actually communicate or present to students via the course documents. Classroom observation was the final method of data collection because it was necessary to observe how the instructors *actually* interacted and collaborated compared to what they said they did while in the interviews.

This sequencing of data collection was necessary to understanding the collaborative and reflective practices of the participants because it allowed for multiple viewpoints into the partnerships under study and provided a means of "checking" each one against the other. First, the interviews were done to determine how the participants conceive of their own collaboration and reflective practices. Second, the classroom observations were conducted to see if the way participants talked about their collaboration could be corroborated by how they interacted in the classroom. Third, the documents were collected in order to identify how their collaboration and disciplinary identities manifested in the documents they created.

Finally, theoretical lenses for analyzing this data were chosen for a number of reasons. Third generation activity theory was chosen to address the first research question because it provided a language and framework for describing group activity. This made it possible to connect study findings to established theory and construct a narrative that took into account multiple aspects of the participants' collaborative practices. A grounded theory approach was chosen for addressing the second research question because I did not want to impose pre-existing theoretical language on the concept of discipline-based metacognitive reflection. A grounded theory approach allowed me to look for trends in the way the study participants talked about their disciplinary identities and reflective practices and build an analysis that was grounded in the language of the data. The concept of reflection is also somewhat nebulous. What qualifies as reflection might look different to different people or in different contexts. The grounded theory approach was the best way to ensure that a rigid definition of reflection was not being imposed on the data and that trends in participant understandings of reflection and disciplinary identity could be accounted for.

Participant Recruitment

Because learning communities are relatively new at the study site, the pool of potential participants was limited to the small number of faculty teaching in a learning community during the spring 2017 semester. While team-taught learning communities occur in the honors program at this institution, the faculty teaching

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in these groups were not approached for participation because the honors program operates within curriculum guidelines that are different from those set forth for the majority non-honors courses. Furthermore, the faculty and students in the honors program cannot be considered representative of the faculty and student populations as whole. As a result, the study was limited to faculty outside the honors program because those faculty voluntarily engage in the design and implementation of learning communities and do not have to adhere to any of the requirements set for the honors program. Limiting the study to these participants allowed me to observe and document the collaborative practices of faculty who are designing their learning community courses outside the more rigid structure of the honors program and maintain the goal of observing the unstructured learning communities at the research site. The study was also limited to instructors who would be teaching in a learning community during the spring 2017 semester so that all participants could take part in classroom observations.

Once the parameters for participation were established, the potential participants were recruited via email during the fall 2016 semester with an IRB-approved recruitment script that outlined the purpose of the study, the nature of data collection, and the confidentiality expectations (See Appendix A: Recruitment Script). There were only three learning communities scheduled for the spring 2017 semester (six instructors total) that met the recruitment parameters, and each of the three pairs agreed to participate. The three

communities represent six academic disciplines as they are organized at the study

site, including linked art appreciation and geology courses, linked introductory

speech communication and beginning Spanish courses, and a team-taught,

sophomore-level history and literature course focusing on the literature of the

New South. In addition to representing six disciplines, these pairings also

represent different levels and styles of collaboration and various lengths of time

working together.[3] The art and geology pair and the speech and Spanish pair were

in their first year of learning community participation at the time of the study and

the history and literature pair had been operating for several semesters before the

start of this study.

Data Collection, Reduction, and Analysis Methods

Potential participants for this study were approached in fall 2016, and

formal data collection began in spring 2017. The data collected included recorded

1-hour interviews with each faculty pair, classroom observations, and the

collection of course documents such as Instructor's Course Requirements

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[3] When discussing the extent to which instructors created new courses in order to participate in the learning communities, a spectrum emerges. The history and literature course was created entirely from scratch in the sense that the instructors never taught this course before and it was not as simple as linking two of their previously existing courses. The art and geology community was linking two previously existing courses, but, because they wanted to integrate the courses as much as possible, they did a great deal of planning how to amend or alter their previously existing courses to make this integration possible. The speech and Spanish learning community decided to keep their courses separate more than the others, and because there was a more natural connection between the content of their previously existing courses, they did not feel they needed to do much to change their curriculum.

documents (ICRs), activity worksheets, and assignment descriptions. Brief

follow-up interviews were conducted in August 2017 to allow instructors to

discuss changes made to their learning communities for the fall 2017 semester. A

follow-up interview with one group was conducted in person and an interview

with a second group was conducted via email due to time constraints. A follow-up

interview did not occur with the third group because the pair was taking a break

from their learning community due to scheduling and had no updates to report. In

the initial interviews, all of the pairs were able to talk about past and current

experiences regarding the planning and implementation of their learning

communities. The art and geology pair and the speech and Spanish pair had each

completed their first attempt at a learning community in fall 2016. At the time of

the interviews, they spoke about the fall 2016 experiences as well as the on-going

collaboration occurring in spring 2017. The literature and history community had

been operating for several semesters prior to spring 2017, so the pair was able to

reflect on several years of collaborative experiences in addition to the semester of

data collection.

The initial interviews were semi-structured in order to allow instructors to

openly discuss their learning community experiences, and follow-up questions

were asked as interviewees made statements that naturally led to the further

discussion of pertinent topics (See Appendix B: Interview Questions). Interviews

were transcribed verbatim and an open coding procedure was used to develop

code categories for text analysis. A number of code categories were derived from the literature on activity theory, and additional codes were developed in-vivo as participant responses displayed patterns. In-vivo codes were derived from Corbin and Strauss's recommendation to code "conceptually similar events/actions/interactions" (12). Interviews were ultimately coded for markers of collaboration as they relate to activity theory and statements and reflections regarding disciplinary identity (See Appendix D: Code Categories).

In addition to conducting interviews, I also visited each learning community during class time to observe the instructors' collaborative style within the context of classroom activities. These observations occurred on days that were convenient for the learning communities and did not include testing or peer review activities. This was to ensure that lecturing, classroom discussion, and faculty collaboration could be observed. Course observations were not recorded to protect the privacy of minors who were dual-enrolled as high school students. However, field notes were taken in order to make comparisons between the interview transcripts and the observations made during the class periods.

Finally, course documents were collected from each pairing in order to analyze the results of the collaborative assignment creation discussed during the interviews. Like the interviews and observations, these documents were also coded using an open coding process using code categories derived from activity theory and the additional codes derived from the interview content.

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Reliability, Validity, and Data Triangulation

In an effort to ensure the validity of the data collected, a number of data triangulation techniques were utilized. First, multiple sources of data, including interviews, observations, and documents, were gathered for the purpose of providing multiple perspectives on the nature of faculty collaboration. While one type of data may provide an incomplete picture of the phenomenon under observation, multiple, "converging lines of inquiry" (Yin 92), were selected to help ensure a more full examination of the research questions. The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain the instructor's perceptions of their collaboration and allow them to describe what they identified to be the most important aspects of their collaboration and experience in the learning communities. On the other hand, observations and document collection were chosen so that I could observe the collaboration that actually occurs in practice, both in the classroom and in the tools developed for the courses.

In addition to multiple types of data, theoretical triangulation was employed to provide more than one theoretical lens for analyzing the data. By using activity theory and grounded theory to examine the data, it was possible to corroborate analyses using one theory by examining the same data set through the lens of a second theory. The grounded theory approach also allowed me to account for information that could not be neatly categorized using activity theory language and enabled me to ground my observations and descriptions in the data.

Finally, multiple coding was employed to achieve reliability in coding. After completing my first round of coding, a second coder was trained in the coding categories and coded 15% of the data. This round of coding produced a simple agreement score of 68% and adjusted agreement score of 0.549 using Cohen's Kappa, which is considered a moderate level of agreement. After refining the language of the coding categories and training document, a different second coder applied codes to another 15% of the data. This round of coding resulted in 78% simple agreement and an adjusted agreement score of 0.677 using Cohen's Kappa, which is considered a substantial level of agreement. This final round of coding was closer to the standard employed by Peter Smagorinsky, whose goal is to achieve 80% agreement on 15% of the data, as he believes that "such a result confirms the reliability of the codes" (401).

A semi-structured interview approach was also purposefully chosen in order to aid in internal validity. In order to be a valid measure of instructor's perceptions of their collaborative practices, the interviews needed to introduce participants to the topics at issue in this study but also allow them the freedom to focus on the aspects of those topics that naturally felt most important to them. The semi-structured approach also allowed for the introduction of clarifying questions and follow-up statements that enabled the participants to confirm or deny my understanding or interpretation of their statements. This helped reduce the

possibility of me interpreting or misunderstanding information gained from the interviews.

Contextual Considerations

As Smagorinksy argues, "contextual factors must be taken into account in order to situate research findings" (403) because relevant aspects of the study's setting can further shed light on the findings. In the case of this study, relevant contextual factors concerning the research site include institutional attitudes about learning communities, relationships between faculty and administration, and other organizational structures. Because the learning community model is a growing trend, there is a spectrum of institutional support for this pedagogical approach when one considers how learning communities are implemented at various colleges and universities. On one end of the spectrum are institutions that do not promote learning communities or provide much support for faculty who are interested in developing them. Institutions on the other end of the spectrum, which are considerably more rare, have developed entire departments to oversee the implementation of learning communities, train faculty, and advise students. Toward the middle of the spectrum are institutions that allow faculty the flexibility to create learning communities but can only provide limited administrative resources for implementing them. The site of study for this project falls somewhere along the middle of the spectrum, as faculty are encouraged to

try new curricular models, but instructors sometimes report difficulty in implementing them due to rigid institutional structures.

In the past few years, learning communities and team-taught courses at the study site have increased in number because the campus has a strong tradition of allowing faculty to design and implement innovative courses that enhance student success and critical thinking. However, not all of the planned courses make it into the final schedule each semester due to a number of factors including faculty scheduling preferences, enrollment numbers, and lack of administrative support. Lack of administrative support is closely tied to the lack of formal institutional structures for developing and implementing learning communities and is not necessarily a reflection of a particular attitude toward learning communities. In fact, administration at the local level (department chairs and deans) is highly encouraging and enthusiastic about the learning community model. However, limited resources and structures prevent widespread support for the implementation and oversight of these kinds of classes.

It is important to identify the level of institutional support learning communities receive when attempting to explain how they operate because implementing these courses is often more complicated than implementing standard courses. The nature of the administrative support received can play a significant role in the implementation of the learning community and can help or hinder the collaborative practices of the faculty before the first day of classes even

begin. This is due to the level of coordination necessary between several offices, which is largely beyond the instructors' control, including administrators, administrative assistants, and registrars. For this reason, the level of institutional support strongly influences the strengths and weaknesses of learning community implementation. It is also important to consider this when discussing study methodology because the extent to which a school has institutionalized learning communities can play a role in how faculty collaborate and how they successful they are in implementing the community.

Study Limitations and Threats

There are several potential limitations and threats to this study. A prominent limitation is the size of the participant group. Not all learning communities that have been implemented at this site in the past are represented. One of the factors affecting the number of participants was availability of scheduling for the spring 2017 semester. Faculty who had taught in a learning community in the past but were not involved in one at the time of the study were also excluded so all participants could participate equally in the data collection process (i.e. classroom observations would not be possible with former learning community instructors).

Another limitation is the nature of the case study method. Because the goal of this research is basic and descriptive, it is not possible to make cause and effect statements or broad generalizations based on the type of data collected.

However, this kind of descriptive research is a useful starting point for examining how learning communities are examples of interdisciplinary activity systems creating new, shared objects while retaining a number of markers from their original disciplines. Although the study is small in size and descriptive in nature, which constitute limitations, this study could be a useful starting point for explaining some of the potential benefits of learning communities and encouraging the institution to invest is larger-scale studies that can look for ways to improve the use of learning communities for teaching and learning at the research site.

A potential threat to this study is the Hawthorne effect. According to Michael Boyle and Mike Schmierbach, this threat to validity can result from participants' tendencies to "change their behavior when they are being observed, participating in a study, or otherwise receiving additional attention" (227). This is certainly a threat to the validity of this study, as participants were aware of researcher presence during classroom observations and were responsible for identifying class periods that they believed to be useful for observation. Allowing participants the freedom to choose the dates of observation was important, however, because observing a number of class activities would not have produced data that relates to the research questions of this study (testing days, peer review activities, etc.)

Another consideration for this study is the position I take as the researcher as it relates to the study participants and research site. As Melanie Birks and Jane Mills explain in their guide to grounded theory, researchers are guided by their "philosophical beliefs and adopted methodology" to "take either a position of distance or acknowledged inclusion in both the field and in the final product of the study" (4). For researchers who do not acknowledge and take into account their proximity to the participants or the research site, they risk leaving their biases and assumptions unacknowledged and unchallenged. In the case of this study, as with all case studies, there was the risk of me being too close to participants or too embedded in the research site to be fully aware of my potential biases. As this kind of researcher bias due to proximity can be a threat to validity, I have attempted to mitigate that threat through the use of multiple coders so that trends in the data were confirmed by additional independent coders who have no connection to the study participants or investment in the research site.

The use of open coding itself also poses potential threats to the study because, as Erik Blair argues, "it can be difficult to code the data in a detached manner" (18). Open coding can also be potentially problematic because "it implies there is an actual truth out there awaiting discovery" (Blair 18). This approach to data analysis can work to downplay the perspective of the researcher if one fails to account for the viewpoint from which they are starting. Again, the

use of multiple coders and the collection of various types of data were choices in method that helped to reduce these threats to the study's findings.

<u>Theoretical Lenses</u>

The remainder of this chapter address the two theoretical lenses through which the data in the study was analyzed—activity theory, which Yrjo Engestrom explains is "most commonly used in educational investigations as a conceptual lens through which data are interpreted" ("Foreword" vii) and grounded theory, which, according to Juliet Corbin "utilizes actual data gathered through field work to identify, develop, and integrate concepts" (301). Explaining the philosophical underpinnings of these two theories will bring into focus the theoretical assumptions and viewpoints that inform the design and implementation of this study.

Vygotsky and the Development of Activity Theory

While the social turn in composition studies, and its resulting theories and pedagogies, is a useful starting point for examining the ways academic disciplines and communities establish and maintain their identities, this dissertation is concerned with how learning communities serve as points of contact between these normally segregated communities in higher education. Because learning communities are places of collaboration and synthesis between disciplines, activity theory serves as useful grounding for moving this discussion beyond what academic disciplines do internally and toward a discussion of what they do when

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they purposefully engage one another for teaching and learning. However, understanding activity theory in its current form first requires a deeper examination of Vygotksy, who has played an important role in the development of both the field of social psychology and the social turn within composition and rhetoric studies.

Lev Vygotsk's early twentieth-century work on the social development of thought and language has played an enormously important role in our understanding of cognitive development and theories of learning. Because he worked during a flourishing period of cognitive research, it is easy to see how Vygotsky's work departed from previous research and differed from his contemporaries. Vygotsky's theories are almost always analyzed in relation to Jean Piaget, whose research in cognitive development around the same time also focused on how children proceed through stages of learning and cognition. Piaget's theories espoused stages of development that ended in adolescence, focused more on the child as an individual, and emphasized the ways children shape their environments. Vygotsky, on the other hand, asserted that a child's development is directly related to the environment, culture, and language to which one is exposed, and that learning can go on indefinitely throughout an individual's life as they adjust to new environments and activities.

Vygotsky's approach, which became known as cultural-historical theory, was a product of his own participation in a tumultuous time in Russia's history.

According to Rene Van Der Veer's overview of Vygotsky's work the cultural context in which he was living, Vygotsky's theories developed as he worked with some of the millions of children who became homeless and destitute as a result of World War 1 and the Russian Revolution. His educational work with adults also influenced his theory. As millions fled Russia, there was a great need to educate adult populations that were traditionally uneducated in order to fill the "vacancies in all layers of the society that could not always be filled by competent candidates" (Van Der Veer 23). Working within this time of social change in Russia caused Vygotsky to consider the cultural and social factors that shape the experiences of individuals and populations, and brought him to the conclusion that an individual or group's marginalization facilitated "profoundly different cultural experiences from 'mainstream' members of society" (Daniels, Cole, and Wertsch 1). This led him to theorize that life-long development is highly influenced by the social and cultural experiences one has within various environments.

The emergence of his theory was also a result of his dissatisfaction with the theories of educational psychology at the time because, as he believed, they dealt with processes of development and language acquisition in isolation. Instead of acknowledging the social context for language development, these early theories of educational psychology relied on the Platonic concept of separation between meaning and language. For this reason, Vygotsky also saw his work as a

direct rejection of Descartes' concepts of dualism and innate knowledge—which

argued that some knowledge is innate and acquired independently of our

experiences and interactions with the world and others. However, he believed in

the holistic approach to describing how individuals process information, learn,

and interact with their environments. In *Thought and Language*, he argued that

language, thought, and, therefore, knowledge are socially constructed

psychological developments, which contrasted with the prevailing idea that

speech is simply an externalization of internal thought.[4] Vygotsky argued,

however, that our inner speech—our thought—is a reflection of external, social

speech. Inner speech does not precede external speech, it comes from external

speech. This concept has come to be deeply influential to composition theorists,

as it is now widely accepted that, as Bruffee argues, "thought is internalized

public and social talk" and "writing of all kinds is internalized social talk made

public and social again" (421). In other words, for Vygotsky, language

development started with outside forces and moved inward where it was

internalized and processed by the individual.

     While Vygotsky's work was left unfinished in his lifetime, his successors,

including A.R. Luria and A.N. Leontiev further developed his theories into what

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[4] *Thought and Language* was published posthumously. According to the translation edited by
Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar, Vygotsky attempted to compile several essays before his
death, and the first editor of the book made few changes. Later translations attempted to remove
the repetition without changing his meaning.

we now know as cultural-historical activity theory, or CHAT as it has also come to be known. As a result, Vygotsky's work is sometimes referred to as first-generation activity theory because it is based on his concept of mediated action in individuals, which attempts to explain how individuals use tools to accomplish goals. It is important to note that Vygotsky was highly interested in group activity, but an early death prevented him from pursuing his theory further. Thus, Luria and Leontiev's work is considered second-generation, as they took Vygotsky's concept of mediated action in individuals and expanded it to describe activity systems, which are groups of individuals who come together for the purpose of accomplishing specific goals.

For Luria, it was vital that explanations of human behavior move beyond the individual and look at a person's external living conditions, including their social and cultural influences, as behavior and activity could only be properly analyzed by examining how people act upon and are acted upon by their environments. Answers to questions about why and how individuals act would be found "most of all in the external conditions of their societal life, in their social-historical forms of existence" (Luria 23). To further distinguish between Vygotsky's first and Luria and Leontiev's second generation activity theory, second generation is concerned with how "societal life," and the establishment and maintenance of communities, produces socially engendered power differentials, roles, and identities that the first generation theory does not fully

account for. These factors are then analyzed within group settings to explain the way the groups, or activity systems, work to accomplish goals.

Third generation activity theory, which has developed within the last two decades primarily through the work of Cole and Engestrom, among others, further expands our understanding of activity to focus on the interactions of multiple activity systems. As a whole, these layers of activity theory can be visualized as concentric circles, with Vygotsky's mediated triangle in the center. Second generation activity expands to include individuals working in groups, and third generation activity theory expands even further to assess the intersection of multiple activity systems that come together and create new, shared activities.

While it is important to look back to first and second generation activity theory to understand the evolution of all the working parts, third generation activity theory will ultimately prove most useful for analyzing learning communities and the kind of activity and collaboration in which they engage. According to Wolff-Michael Roth and Yew-Jin Lee, this third generation cultural-historical activity theory is an "inherently dialectical unit of analysis [that] allows for an embodied mind, itself an aspect of the material world, stretching across social and material environments" (189). In other words, CHAT positions individuals as points on the landscape, materially and non-materially, who both shape and are shaped by these social and material environments. Cole, who is most responsible for bringing activity theory to the attention of Western scholars,

asserts that our traditional binaries of subject/object and person/environment no longer hold, as we have come to understand that "humans inhabit intentional (constituted) worlds" and these dichotomies "cannot be analytically separated and temporally ordered into independent and dependent variables" (103). Before explaining third generation theory further and how it can be used to analyze learning communities, a brief explanation of first and second generation activity theory will provide an overview of how the third generation came to be and establish definitions used by theorists of all generations.

First Generation Activity Theory

First generation activity theory provides a basic framework for explaining the way individuals use tools to accomplish goals and introduces the basic terminology employed through all future generations of activity theory. Just as composition pedagogy frequently uses the rhetorical triangle to show the relationship between text, author, and reader, the activity theory triangle similarly plots the relationship between the key components of the theory. The illustration of Vygotsky's mediated action triangle positions three key parts for analysis: the subject, the object, and the tools (see figure 1). At this level, activity theory can be used to understand how individuals (subjects) use tools, both material and non-material, to mediate their achievement of goals (objects) and realize motives. Thus, tools can be anything that mediate the subject's participation in the activity,

including material tools such as pencils, computers or calculators, and non-

material tools such as language and prior knowledge.

Mediation Means (Tools)

Subject(s)   Object $\longrightarrow$ Outcome
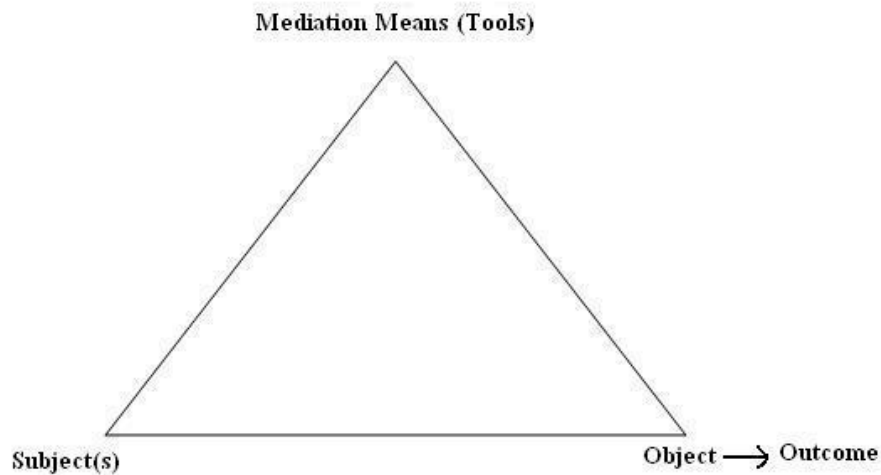
Figure 1 – First Generation Activity Triangle

According to Engestrom, the object is perhaps the most significant part of

the analysis because "objects are concerns; they are generators and foci of

attention, motivation, effort, and meaning" (304) that ultimately provide the basis

for human activity. Without objects, there is no motivation for activity to occur.

The object as motivation is what dictates tool selection and use and guides the

subject as they make decisions about their participation in the activity. A simple

example would be a student (the subject) choosing to utilize a textbook, a

computer, and their partially developed knowledge of course content and topics

(tools) to progress through a first-year writing course (the object). The illustration of the triangle also plots the outcome as a product of all three components of the triangle coming together in the context of the activity.

It is also important to clarify that even though he was attempting to explain the phenomenon of mediated action in individuals, Vygotsky was always working from the assumption that individuals were a product of their social environment and that even individual activity was always socially situated and motivated. In essence, all action is socially constructed. However, he was never able to complete his work in this area and, for this reason, his writings on the topic are mainly focused on how individuals make use of the available tools in any given context.

Second Generation Activity Theory

Because Vygotsky's successor Leontiev believed that a focus on the individual did not fully explain the full nature of human activity, he expanded Vygotsky's theory of mediated action to examine the nature of collective human activity (Gedera 54). The resulting second generation activity theory proves to be a more complex framework because it moves beyond the individual and seeks to provide an explanation for how groups engage in activity and accomplish goals using the collective strengths of all the individuals involved. This requires looking beyond subjects, objects, and tools and including analysis of participant roles and group rules and expectations. As Annalisa Sannino, Harry Daniels, and Kris

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Gutierrez explain, this level of activity theory is a broad theory for analyzing "development within practical social activities" (1) in order to evaluate how groups go about the processes of creating hierarchies, delegating roles, and completing the specific tasks included in the broad aims of the activity.

At this level, groups identify the objects of their actions (generating knowledge, environmental activism, engaging in labor negotiations, etc.) and the tools necessary for representing those objects. These groups, according to Roth and Lee, "engage in concretely realizing an existing collectively defined activity" that is also "motivated by collective, societal concerns" (194). They also clarify that "activity" does not refer to events with defined starting and ending points, which they would assert are better defined by the word "tasks." Instead, "activity" refers to sociohistorical undertakings that, in some way, work to create and sustain human societies in addition to engaging and maintaining individuals. Roth and Lee list "farming, commerce, dance, architecture, and, as a more recent form, mass schooling" as examples of "historical activities with objects and motives" that, throughout time, have maintained society. (198). The product of the activity is not confined or restricted to the subjects involved, as the product can ultimately be exchanged, distributed, and consumed by the local community or society at large.

Second generation activity theory also looks at how participants take on distinct roles within the group and form new identities in relation to the aims of

the group, and this factor is what makes second generation activity theory more complex than Vygotsky's original description of simple mediated action (Roth). Division of labor within groups, which can occur organically or be determined according to hierarchical organizational structures, plays an important role in facilitating the work being done. Roth and Lee provide the example of a seventh-grade class working on a project to clean a local creek and document the elements of its ecosystem. Group roles and division of labor occurred as students made independent decisions in addition to receiving instruction and direction from their teacher. The artifacts produced by the group were distributed and consumed by the community because the students created documents and presentations with the goal of educating or involving other local citizens and groups. Furthermore, the project worked to change the students' identities because, as the project progressed, they came to define themselves as more than just students but as participants in the group, concerned citizens, and scientists.

The second generation activity theory triangle accounts for these added layers by including more points for analysis than are included in the first generation triangle, including rules, community, and division of labor:
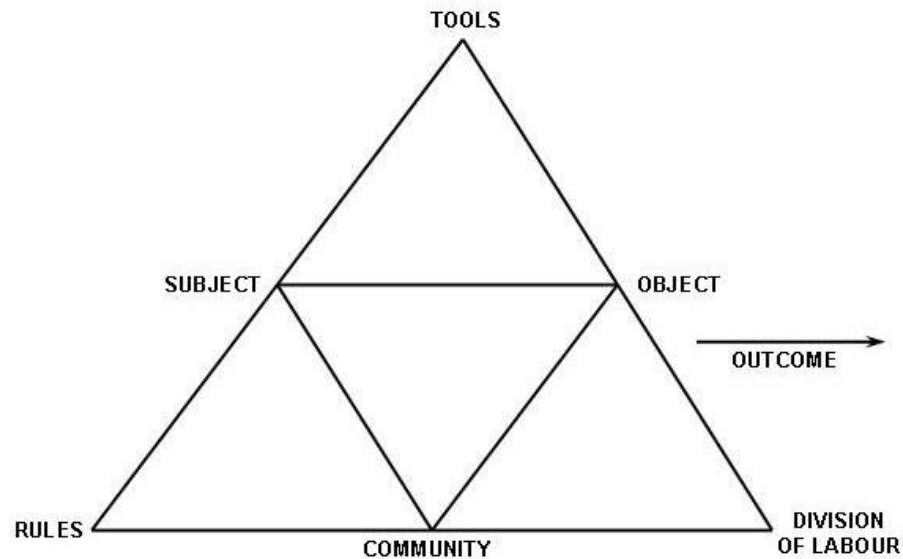
Figure 2 – Second Generation Activity Triangle

Third Generation Activity Theory

Third generation activity theory embeds all aspects of the second

generation but expands its focus to the larger network of activity systems created

by the interaction of multiple systems. In "A cultural-historical approach to

distributed cognition," Cole and Engestrom argue that "thinking occurs as much

among as within individuals" (43), and their third generation version of activity

theory focuses on collective behavior as the basic unit of analysis. In "Activity

theory and individual and social transformation," Engestrom argues that the

traditional division between behavioral and social sciences is problematic because

the "dualistic framework does not help us to understand today's deep social

transformations" (19). For this reason, third generation activity theory seeks to "dialectically link" (19) individuals with the social structures in which they engage.

The third generation theory is an interdisciplinary endeavor, as it examines how activity across systems can "transform our social conditions, resolve contradictions, generate new cultural artifacts, and create new forms of life and the self" (Sannino, Daniels, and Gutierrez 1). This emphasis on how multiple systems interact has a distinct focus on the transformative aspect of participation between systems because, as Engestrom explains, activity always produces change for individuals and, thus, groups, because people are constantly changing and developing new goals and motives, and these "new objects are often not intentional products of a single activity but unintended consequences of multiple activities" ("The Future of Activity Theory" 304). This transformative aspect of interaction and collaboration can be intentional or unintentional, but it requires a revaluation of the way tools are used for certain purposes, and the objects traditionally envisioned for certain activities. For this reason, the third generation activity triangle again increases in complexity because it includes a visualization of two activity systems interacting to produce new and shared objects:
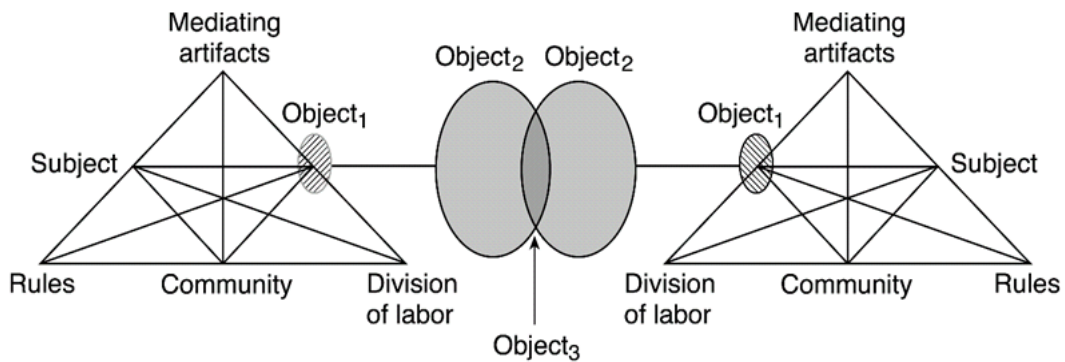
Figure 3 – Third Generation Activity Triangle

The third generation is also the point at which scholars of composition and

rhetoric have been able to mine the work of activity theory and apply it to our

understandings of discourse communities, genre, writing transfer, and

disciplinarity. Russell's discussion of activity theory is particularly useful in

helping elucidate the ways communities of practice organize and operate. Russell

draws on Cole and Engestrom's third generation version of activity theory

pictured above; however, he expands on their work by focusing on the concept of

genre within and across activity systems. Russell argues that genres used within

activity systems "produce stability" because they represent "shared expectations

among some group(s) of people." This requires an expansion of the traditional

view of genre to include what Russell calls social action and social motives, a

concept developed by Carolyn Miller when she argues that "genres serve as keys

to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (165). Genres,

then, are not just sets of definable textual characteristics but are "ways of recognizing and predicting how certain tools…may be used to help participants act together purposefully." This concept of genre becomes imperative for understanding how activity systems operate because the existence of the system is dependent upon a common understanding of how to use various tools, including writing.

In *Agents of Integration* Rebecca Nowacek discusses activity theory and genre as it relates to writing transfer across courses, and, similar to Russell, she provides an understanding of how genre plays an important role in shaping the expectations of an activity system. She says:

> The recognition of unexpected similarities and connections can be cued by the routinized epistemic spaces genres provide…Genre not only provides a sociocognitive resource for crafting a response to a social situation but it also provides a resource for interpreting (and indeed constructing) that situation in the first place. (18)

Not only do genres help us understand how to respond to particular rhetorical situations, they provide "routinized epistemic spaces" that allow members of the group to adopt a common understanding of how knowledge is made and disseminated within the community. Because third generation activity theory is concerned with activity across multiple systems, genres also help group members

understand how and when to make use of certain tools when engaging in the smaller tasks of the activities.

The concept of activity system interaction becomes more complex, however, when we must account for the various systems in which a person operates. When two systems come together and engage a new, shared object, it is often because there are members who participate in both groups and can serve as connectors between the activity systems. As Russell explains, people belong to multiple systems and embody multiple identities and subject positions within them at any given time in their life. This leads to the cross use of the tools and conventions of these various systems. This process often occurs when a new person joins an activity system, learns the use of that system's tools, and then returns to a more familiar system to test and use the newly acquired knowledge. A common example of this occurs when students take tools and conventions from one system (workplace, family, social systems) and use them in classroom settings. As Nowacek argues, third generation activity theory is not just concerned with the way individuals functions within one activity system. Instead, the theory brings "attention to the transit of people and ideas among varied and often competing activity systems" (21). While she is primarily focusing on how students recontextualize information in order to transfer knowledge from one learning context to the next, she provides an important analysis of how

individuals operate within activity systems and cross disciplinary boundaries, bringing with them knowledge and tools from various systems.

She also argues that students transfer knowledge from one discipline to the next more often than previously thought, which further supports the idea that tools are often transferred between activity systems as members move between them. Nowacek argues that "activity theory helps us to see that borrowed materials are never devoid of resonances from other activity systems" (22) even when they go through the transformative processes of moving across activity systems. For Nowacek, knowledge and writing transfer across systems is an inherently transformative process because it is "an act of reconstruction" wherein "both the old and new contexts—as well as what is being transferred—may be understood differently as a result" (25). Russell argues that the fluidity of systems and the constant back and forth of individuals ultimately has a transformative effect on systems over time. This fluidity means disciplines have no choice but to reevaluate their conventions and expectations and embrace the need to "occasionally change the ways they write and teach students to write to accomplish changes in their activity systems" ("Big Picture People").

Third generation activity theory is important to understanding the renewed focus on interdisciplinary collaboration within academic contexts because it provides a framework for understanding the nature of tool use and communication within and across systems as participants are constantly

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transforming, expanding, and renegotiating objects and tool use when they move between their various networks.

However, it is also necessary to identify critiques of third generation activity theory as a framework for describing and analyzing the complexity of human "activity." As David Bakhurst argues, he is "less confident" about "what the concept of activity really amounts to" (198). He also proceeds to question the use of the word theory itself, and argues that it is unclear that activity theory truly amounts to a theory at all. He says, "what we have here is a model or a schema that has minimal predictive power. If activity theory is a theory, it warrants the name because it is a theoretical representation of the general structure of activity systems" (206). Michele Minnis and Vera John-Steiner's critique of activity theory similarly questions the use of the word theory—their criticism stems from the idea that some proponents of the theory believe it can integrate a number of different traditions into a "single theoretical system," a claim they believe to be "unrealistic" (310). They conclude their criticism by arguing that it would be preferable to "construct a set of interrelated theories which reveal richness at different levels of analysis" (310).

Despite some of the potential problems with third generation activity theory that Bakhurst, Minnis, and John-Steiner point out, activity theory still provides a useful starting point and framework for analyzing the various components and factors that connect activity systems and facilitate the kind of

collaboration occurring within the learning communities studied in this dissertation. The language of activity theory provides a way to connect concepts of discourse communities, communities of practice, and interdisciplinarity to the kind of activity observed in this study.

Using Activity Theory to Analyze Learning Communities

Because current work being done in composition and rhetoric and third generation activity theory are both concerned with the collaborative nature of establishing disciplinary identity and practice, both avenues of research are important to any investigation that seeks to analyze and evaluate the collaborative practices within learning communities. First, research trends in composition and rhetoric provide an avenue for examining disciplinary conventions and defining the various discourses at work in higher education. Leaning communities may represent unique communities of practice where different disciplines are represented and blended, but it is important to be able to account for each of those disciplines separately before analyzing interdisciplinary learning community collaboration. For this reason, composition and rhetoric can play an important role in investigations of learning community pedagogy by looking at the different genres and discourses that have a part in the makeup of a learning community.

Third generation activity theory also provides an important framework for understanding learning communities because it allows us to plot the relationships between the various components of a learning community and account for the

interactions of subject, objects, tools, roles, division of labor, and outcomes. Third

generation theory, specifically, is important because, unlike second generation

theory, it also accounts for the complexity of multiple activity systems interacting,

working together, and creating shared objects. Perhaps the most important

application of activity theory to an understanding of learning communities comes

from Anne Marcovich and Terry Shinn, who argue that the most important

questions currently facing the study of disciplinarity are ones related to the ways

disciplines interact with one another. Instead of focusing solely on how the

various disciplines define their discourses and organize themselves, Marcovich

and Shinn argue we should be focusing on what happens when disciplines meet

and speak to one another.[5]

In addition, Marcovich and Shinn claim that these kinds of inquiries into

cross-disciplinary work shows that "coexistence within the same project of

scientists based in different disciplines signifies neither the fusion nor the

disappearance of the disciplines" (583). As third generation theory indicates,

activity systems that meet and interact become a new space that includes remnants

of the original activity systems in addition to creating new, shared objects. This is

certainly true of learning communities, as they inhabit a space that requires new

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[5] Marcovich and Shinn were looking at research spaces in the context of the sciences. However, their claims about the nature of interdisciplinary research practices resonate with the collaboration occurring within interdisciplinary teaching spaces like a learning community.

categorization. Vera John-Steiner, Robert Weber, and Michele Minnis's definition of collaboration is also useful when paired with Marcovich and Shins's explanation of cross-disciplinary work, as their analysis of collaboration similarly focuses on what occurs when individuals from different areas of expertise come together. They argue:

> The principals in a true collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators, they not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in a true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent: no individual's point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants' contributions. (2)

Learning communities are not simply two disciplines working together—the collaboration that occurs in these settings gives rise to new communities of practice that value and acknowledge the disciplinary conventions of two or more disciplines all while establishing their own unique community identity. In this way, they are a place where disciplines neither fuse nor disappear. Because they coexist in these spaces where collaborators from "independent conceptual schemes" must identify how to create "original frameworks" that will suit the needs of the community, those working in composition and rhetoric and social

psychology stand to gain a great deal of knowledge from analyzing the way these types of communities form and operate.

Grounded Theory

In addition to using activity theory, grounded theory was also used to analyze the data collected for this study in order to provide a different perspective on the information gathered from the interviews, observations, and documents. While the use of activity theory for data analysis required me to impose the language and theoretical framework of activity theory on to the data, the use of grounded theory allowed me to analyze the data for any naturally occurring trends and concepts for which activity theory could, perhaps, not account or fully explain.

Grounded theory, which was first developed through Glaser and Strauss's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* is an inductive approach to qualitative research, and, like activity theory, it has progressed through a number of "generations." These generations each represent developments in the understanding of how grounded theory can orient a researcher to the data in question. According to Birks and Mills, first generation grounded theory (most notably the works of Glaser, Strauss, Corbin, et. al) did not provide much discussion of methodological consideration and instead focused on methods as "the various strategies and techniques that could be used" (5). In response to this, second generation theorists developed "methodological frameworks for grounded

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theory that are clearly underpinned by various philosophies" (Birks and Mills 5). As these frameworks have developed, the literature on grounded theory has included more discussions of the philosophical and methodological implications of using grounded theory for the analysis of data.

Grounded Theory Methodology and Philosophy

As grounded theorists became more interested in methodological frameworks, a number of works have emerged to explain them, trace their origins, and situate them within "paradigms of inquiry," which Sotirios Sarantakos in *Social Research* describes as a "set of propositions about how the world is perceived" (30). According to Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, these possible paradigms of inquiry are positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism. They further explain that a researcher must ask a series of questions to distinguish between these paradigms and determine the paradigm within which they are working. These include questions about what the researcher believes about the nature of reality, what can be known, and how a researcher can discover what can be known.

In Merilyn Annells "Grounded Theory Method: Philosophical Perspectives, Paradigm of Inquiry, and Postmodernism," she explains the implications of each of these paradigms of inquiry by highlighting their underlying assumptions about reality, knowledge, and truth. Within the positivist paradigm, she explains, reality is treated as an objective and discoverable truth

that can be identified through research. In the postpositive tradition, researchers

also believe an objective reality exists but differ from positivists in that they

believe it cannot be fully understood or discovered. According to Annells,

modified experimental research, hypothesis falsification, and "emic viewpoints

collected through qualitative research" are all acceptable means of accumulating

knowledge (384). In contrast, the critical theory paradigm encompasses

poststructuralism and postmodernism to identify a "virtual reality" that has been

created through a variety of values and social constructs over time. Researchers

working in this tradition rely on a "reconstructive dialogic and dialectical

process" to find knowledge. Finally, Annells explains the implications of a

constructivist paradigm and argues that "the knower is subjectively and

interactively linked in relationship to what can be known" and "methodologically,

the researcher engages in an inquiry process that *creates* knowledge through

interpreted constructions" (385). As a result, this philosophical perspective

acknowledges the existence of multiple local, context-specific realities that must

be acknowledged in the process of identifying methods and tools of data analysis.

While Annells sees herself working within the constructivist paradigm, she also

argues that grounded theory can be conducted within any of these paradigms;

however, it is imperative for researchers at the start of the inquiry process to

justify their decision to work within a particular paradigm through proper

planning and reporting. As Birks and Mills explain, it is the methodological and

philosophical framework influences the way a researcher chooses to employ

grounded theory tools and methods.

Methods in Grounded Theory

According to Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz, grounded theory

methods are designed to enable researchers to maintain "persistent interaction

with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging

analyses" (1). Some of the methods they believe are considered essential to a

grounded theory approach include initial coding and categorizing of data,

concurrent data collection and analysis, memo writing, theoretical sampling,

intermediate and advanced coding, and theoretical saturation.

According to Strauss and Corbin, open coding is the first phase of a

grounded theory approach when selecting tools for data analysis because the

examination and analysis of the texts in question leads to the emergence of codes.

As Charmaz argues in *Constructing Grounded Theory,* "coding generates the

bones of your analysis…thus [it] is more than a beginning; it shapes an analytic

frame from which you build the analysis" (45). The process of data collection and

coding also becomes recursive, as more data should be collected once a sample

has been analyzed for ideas that can be pursued in additional data. Charmaz also

points out that this process is different from the coding used in quantitative data

analysis, as that process relies on "*preconceived* categories or codes to the data"

(46). In the grounded theory approach, codes are created based on the trends that

emerge from the data itself. The coding process also occurs in several steps. First, initial coding allows the researcher to ask big-picture questions about the point of view of the data and apply provisional codes that indicate the researcher's openness to adjusting them based on future analyses. Additional steps in the initial coding process, according to Charmaz, could include word-by-word coding or lin-by-line coding. After initial coding has identified trends and provisional codes, focused coding uses the most frequently occurring provisional codes to process additional sections of data and test the "adequacy of those codes" (Charmaz 57).

Chapter 4: Results

The following sections of this chapter isolate each of the three learning communities in this study and discuss the results of data analysis. Subtopics gleaned from the data include findings pertaining to the origins of the communities, the backgrounds of the instructors and their motivations for participation, the process of planning the curriculum, the creation of course documents and artifacts, and the resulting implementation of the learning community courses.

The Art and Geology Learning Community

The art and geology learning community is the pairing of ARTS 1301, an art appreciation course, and GEOL 1405, an environmental science course. These courses, are, on the surface, perhaps the most unlikely pairing for a learning community. However, the instructors reported that their goal for the community was to create curriculum that encourages students to see the intersection of art and environmental science. This community also represents two disciplines that do not interact often at the research site because they are in different divisions—Humanities and Math and Science.

According to the instructors, their introduction to one another happened through other campuses-related encounters, primarily through a program for new full-time faculty. After both instructors engaged in informal conversations about the links between art and science, they came up with the idea for the learning

community, although it was not something they would attempt to create right away. Having science in her background, the art instructor reported that she felt strongly about the lack of communication and collaboration between these two areas of study and believed that an art/science learning community could be a means of bridging that gap. As she explains it, "I've had so many situations in my past where the fact that the two fields don't meet and speak and interchange causes a loss of knowledge." The goal of this community, according to the instructors, was to look at the historical connections between art and environment but also to look at the ways art and science can solve social and environmental problems together going forward.

Planning for the Learning Community

During the interview, the instructors explained that the preparations for the learning community occurred over the span of a few semesters, although they occurred sporadically. Before the fall of 2016 it took nearly a year and a half to finally get the community off the ground—one semester enrollment was too low to keep the courses and another semester they were scrapped due to changes in the state's core curriculum. However, delays in implementation gave the instructors more time to consider the links between their courses and consider activities and assignments that would highlight the ways the art and environmental science disciplines intersect.

During the interview, both instructors addressed disciplinary identity and expectations multiple times while discussing the process of planning curriculum. Both instructors displayed an awareness of their own disciplinary identity both in theory and in practice by explaining some of the underlying assumptions and beliefs of their disciplines and then explaining how those shape classroom practices. Their experiences together in the classroom also allowed them to make statements about their partners' disciplinary expectations and conventions as they had come to understand them. In order to determine how to connect their existing course materials, the instructors both examined their own curriculum separately and then came together to look at ways their existing assignments and activities could be blended.

When the art instructor reflected on this process, she explained that combining the content required her to accommodate the needs of the geology curriculum more than she anticipated. This was not because they viewed the geology content as more important but rather identified it as "more rigid." While the geology instructor did not want the needs of his curriculum to dictate the entire course schedule, he said his material "builds on itself," and, for that reason, "we can't bounce around too much in science." On the other hand, the art instructor felt that her curriculum was far more flexible, which enabled her to choose the order in which she presented material. She said, "I am free to adjust. There are some things I want to teach no matter what this semester, but the rest I

can kind of mix and match and tailor…. It is ok if I talk about the renaissance one week and pre-history the next week. It is not that big of a deal." This also allowed her to look at the geology instructor's weekly lessons and plan her material accordingly. Because his material needed to stay relatively the same whether he was teaching in the learning community or not, she was willing to adjust her lessons to match what he was covering in any given week. However, the geology instructor realized the importance of flexibility in both courses and indicated a desire to make more time for joint projects in future semesters. The geology course is actually a blended section, meaning the students are expected to do a portion of the coursework online. This, he felt, could be a means of enabling more flexibility because he could rely on students to do more online work in order to make space for more hands-on joint projects that blend their material during the face-to-face class time.

       While planning, they also looked for ways to create new experiences for the students that would not simply be a mash-up of the activities they did in their non-learning community courses. This included planning for three potential field trips to sites that specifically highlight the links between art and geology. As the geology instructor explained, they did not want to go on "a geology field trip and then one day go on an art field trip." They also looked for ways to incorporate lab times into the art material. ARTS 1301 is not a course with a lab component, but

they wanted to include projects that could utilize the art labs in order to integrate the required lab component of GEOL 1405.

Developing Course Documents and Activities

The instructors for this learning community explained they wanted to create an experience for their students that would be different from their non-learning community classes, and this required the creation of assignments and handouts that were either adapted or entirely new. The desire to create as blended an environment as possible is first evident from the common ICR (Instructor's Course Requirements), which has been designed to function as one shared document and not two separate ICRs. The document still makes clear that the community is a collaboration of two classes, as the formatting of the document includes two columns—the left column lists GEOL 1405-specific information and the right column is devoted to ARTS 1305 information. However, the creation of one uniform document indicates the instructor's commitment to blending the courses as much as possible while still detailing the different requirements for both instructors. The course evaluation section of the ICR indicates that grades for the art component of the community focus more heavily on essays and extended responses while the grades for the geology component focus more on exams and daily homework assignments. The ICR also states that grades are kept separate for each course and the instructors do not collaborate on grading assignments. Even for assignments that could be graded collaboratively, Blackboard does not

recognize the courses as being linked, so for the sake of gradebook simplicity, grades are kept separate. A textbook is required for the art course but no textbook or lab manual is required in geology.

Because one of the goals of this community was to have integrated course documents beyond the ICR whenever possible, they attempted to include several handouts and lecture presentations that had been co-created, or, at least, revised by both instructors. This collaboration took place through Google Docs, where they have shared access to the documents and could make changes and add information that they deem to be necessary for the handout or assignment. For several activities, the documents were first created by the geology instructor for use in previous semesters and the art instructor then added to and changed the handouts where necessary. For example, one activity handout is a PowerPoint document entitled "Art and Ecology: Drawing and Specimen Identification Exercise." The assignment, which they revised specifically for the learning community, requires students to choose five specimens discussed in class and identify the type of life form, habitat, and trophic level, all of which are concepts learned during the geology lectures. The handout also requires students to provide a drawing of the specimen, which requires them to utilize the drawing techniques and spatial reasoning discussed in art lectures. It also emphasized the value of drawing techniques. In the interviews, both instructors confirmed this skill to be important to their disciplines. According to the art instructor's interview, students

often think, "why bother drawing something when we've got photographs of everything?" But after discussing the way the eye processes drawings versus photographs, students "were able to see that they did better drawings looking at the illustration versus the photograph." Having some facility with drawing is also important in geology because, as the geology instructor explained, "if you were out in the field and you found a fossil and lost your camera or something, you'd have to draw it out." This assignment sheet is an example of the instructors' decision to find common ground between their disciplines and co-create a document that highlights and fuses the values of both fields.

Another assignment that combined the goals of both courses was a contour map project that required working in the art department clay lab. This activity did not have a formal assignment sheet but was explained to students verbally during the time I observed the class. Several art-focused handouts, however, were provided to students to help them understand and utilize the underlying concepts relating to the project. According to the interview, the assignment also underwent several transformations between the fall 2016 semester and the spring 2017 semester when I observed the lab activity. In fall 2016 the project was to make a clay volcano. The project itself was preceded by lessons on how to read aerial photographs and then create and read topographic maps. After learning topography basics, the students made paper templates of each layer of the volcano. The final part of the project was to utilize the ceramics lab to create a

clay model of the volcano using the paper layer templates. Both instructors felt this project was only semi-successful because the students had limited skills working with clay. The geology instructor wanted the volcano to look more like an art piece in the end but students struggled to implement the texturing techniques the art instructor discussed during the creation of the volcano.

The project was revised for the spring 2017 semester, and, instead of building a volcano, the students were tasked with creating a ceramic version of a specimen discussed during geology lectures. After choosing a specimen, they made paper and tape templates and then went to the ceramics lab to cover the 3D templates in clay. The activity included a handout with pictures of ceramic sculptures that featured different surface techniques for working with clay. On the back side of the handout there were four more pictures and blank spaces that required students to identify the techniques used to create the different textures featured in the pictures. The geology instructor's primary role in the project was to teach students how to construct a contour maps of the sculptures, but he also participated by making a sculpture and providing relevant context information about the specimens to further make connections to the geological aspect of the project. Ultimately, the instructors believed this activity allowed them to introduce several important concepts to their students, including how to work in a clay lab, how to treat and use clay, and how to create and read contour maps.

Implementing the Learning Community

While planning took place during the semesters prior to the start of the learning community, the instructors realized that it would not be possible to fully understand how to blend the course content until they were in the classroom and listening to each other lecture and discuss their content and expectations with the students. According to the art instructor, "we ended up winging it the first semester." In the words of the geology instructor, "we really just had to build it week by week." For this reason, the community is also distinct in the amount of time the students and instructors spend together. Because the geology course has a lab component, the students and instructors are together for over eight hours a week, and the structure of the combined courses provides everyone involved intensive collaborative opportunities because both instructors attend all portions of both classes and the lab.

Many learning communities require the students to enroll in both classes, but the instructors do not always share the classroom space. They may coordinate curriculum and assignments but maintain more independence during the actual delivery of the content. Because this pair attends all portions of the each other's classes, they believe it provides an important opportunity for each of them to develop a deeper understanding of what their partner is doing and how their material can fit into the existing framework of their partner's course. According to the geology instructor, "it is the only way we could learn to mix our content more

because when you hear it you start brainstorming while the other person is talking." As a result, a typical class period includes impromptu participation from the partner who is not currently lecturing or overseeing an activity. As the geology instructor explains:

> I listen to her lectures. I find the content interesting. So, I just sit back there and I listen. If you notice, I try to add to the conversation… at some point you become the student. We are not usually talking at the same time, but if I see something and it dawns on me that wait, wait, there is a connection here, we will stop each other and maybe interject…at times it feels like two separate classes, but at other times we kind of merge the subjects we are teaching when we can. We want to find as many areas as possible where we can bring topics together and show how they are linked.

This impromptu collaboration allows them to fill in the gaps of their pre-course planning. It also allows them to model the behavior they hope to see in their students—asking questions, adding to the conversation, and trying to make connections between the information.

Although they explain they are continually looking for ways to make these knowledge connections, both instructors acknowledge that their disciplines are different and take different approaches to information. Understanding these differences allows them to structure the community to accomplish the goals of

both courses and assess student work accordingly. When asked about the ways

they perceive their disciplinary differences in terms of content and teaching, the

geology instructor said:

> Her stuff is subjective mostly and opinion based and mine is just based on
> facts and concepts…we have to take a different approach in many
> ways...when we are the student we can see it more from that perspective.
> When you sit down and listen to the other instructor conduct class, [we]
> have to shift gears. [We] kind of have to think differently.

This different kind of thinking was also evident in the kind of writing they asked

their students to do and the way they assessed that writing. While both instructors

required their students to demonstrate an understanding of key concepts related to

their fields, the art assignments were generally more writing intensive because

they required students to go beyond the key concepts of art technique and history

and provide extended opinion-based responses to the material. The art instructor

is also involved with an institutional quality enhancement plan that required an

extra, documented focus on critical thinking. She chose to revise some of her

writing assignments in response to this quality enhancement plan by asking

student to analyze art pieces, compare and contrast them, and provide evidence

for their claims. In contrast, the geology instructor does not utilize lengthy written

responses and instead uses multiple choice and matching quizzes and exams. He

does this in order to allow students to take quizzes multiple times, as they can

provide automatic feedback and scores. For his curriculum, he sees it as a more

sustainable approach that does not require him to re-grade multiple homework

assignments.

Overall, this community is unique within this study because of the amount

of time spent together during the week and the amount of integration the

instructors attempt to achieve within curriculum that is traditionally not linked.

However, as following sections will show, many of their collaborative tendencies

are similar to those the other pairs, and they went through similar processes to

plan and implement their learning community.

The Speech and Spanish Learning Community

The speech and Spanish learning community is a pairing of SPCH 1311,

an introductory speech communication class and SPAN 1411, a beginning

Spanish class. This collaboration occurred when the speech instructor approached

the Spanish instructor. At this institution, speech and Spanish fall under the same

department, so, unlike the other two learning communities, the instructors

indicated they knew each other well prior to discussing a possible learning

community. This pairing also represents the most traditional execution of a

learning community in the sense that each instructor maintained an autonomous

classroom space. When one of the instructors went to the other's class it was in

the role of guest instructor. According to the speech instructor, "We weren't

always in the classroom at the same time. This was two separate courses and we

were both responsible for teaching our own content. There were some overlaps and some times that we did combine but not that often." This structure is most typical of linked course learning communities because they require less work in terms of planning and integrating curriculum. It is also the most common structure because many learning communities tend to include courses that are "logically related" (Dodge and Kendall 150). As a result, the instructors do not need to be as intentionally innovative to integrate the curriculum because there are already numerous examples of how to link the curriculum.

Planning for the Learning Community

Despite the fact that the material for these two courses was already "logically related" and the instructors believed it was easy to combine certain aspects of their curriculum, the course still required planning before the start of the semester. Like the art and geology community, the instructors each took stock, separately, of the assignments and lessons delivered in their non-learning community courses. They then began to pinpoint the natural places of intersection and figure out how to deliver that integrated content.

Like the art and geology pair, this pair realized during the planning phase that a notable aspect of planning and sequencing curriculum was the issue of flexibility of content. This was especially apparent for the speech instructor when looking for places to combine the curriculum because she felt that it was easier for her to incorporate aspects of his content into her lectures. This resulted in him

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spending several periods in her classroom guest lecturing and assisting, and it ended up taking time away from one of her normal assignments, a researched speech that required the students choose a topic and provide sources. She decided to cut this from the learning community curriculum because she did not know where to put it when they finalized their schedule. However, during the interview, she explained that she wanted to figure out how to work the researched speech back in to the schedule in the future because it was an important component of the speech curriculum she felt she was missing but did not know how to incorporate at the time of planning for the learning community.

As a result of what the speech instructor believed to be a time crunch in the schedule, she felt she had to determine which assignments were vital and which ones could be modified or eliminated for the sake of the new blended curriculum. The Spanish instructor reported that he did not have to change much of anything about his course because, as the speech instructor felt, "It is a little easier for me to work his stuff into my class with culture and all of that than it is for him to work speech into Spanish. I had a lot of opportunities to do that with nonverbal communication and cultural differences in language." Like the art and geology community, this pair identified one of their courses as more flexible than the other and realized that one of the courses would have to be more accommodating than the other.

While planning the course, there were some obvious ways to align their activities and assignments, and the planning was aided by the speech instructor's firsthand knowledge of the Spanish course, which was a course she had audited a year prior to starting the community. As the speech instructor explains, their course planning came out of informal discussions about the things they did in class that were similar. She says:

> It was just from discussion like, you're doing that in your class? I am doing that in my class. We can basically overlap. The other one is he has them make a video selling something in Spanish, and I was doing something similar in my class where they had to make a video like a PSA selling something, so it was like, well, we are already doing this, so why don't we combine it?

Identifying their similar assignments was fairly easy, but they then had to take into consideration the way the speeches would be assessed for a grade considering the speeches would count for a grade in both classes.

When looking at the specifics of the speeches that would be used in both classes, the instructors highlighted several components that had to be assessed according to discipline-specific concerns. According to the speech instructor, delivery, structure, and content are the primary rubric categories that each contain specific markers of a successful speech. Some of these markers are eye contact, appropriate gestures, and the organizational flow of the material. However, in the

context of the learning community, she largely ignored content because the speeches were presented in Spanish and the content was prescribed by the Spanish instructor. This meant that the Spanish instructor provided grades and feedback on the content portion of the speech, including, pronunciation, grammatical correctness, and appropriate use of language for the subject. Although they essentially split the assessment of the speeches, with the speech instructor focusing on form and the Spanish instructor focusing on content, the speech instructor reported that she was able to use the rubric for her non-learning community course speeches and only made a few minor changes related to content grades in order to accommodate the assessment of learning community speeches.

Developing Course Documents and Activities

Unlike the other pairs in this study, these instructors kept most of their materials separate. Their ICRs were separate and they used, for the most part, the same ones they would normally use for their non-learning community classes. They did include special notations that indicated these were linked courses and the instructors would be working together. In the speech instructor's ICR she describes it as "a special topic, learning community course that is combined with Spanish 1411…Thus, the focus will be on developing intercultural competency and understanding intercultural communication." This echoed the Spanish instructor's ICR section on class focus, as he used phrases such as "cultural

context," "cultural awareness," and "communicative and cultural competence" to give students an overview of the course and its goals.

The fact that these instructors chose not to create a new, blended ICR did not seem to be a problem for this particular community because the courses, whether part of a learning community or not, have similar aims and expectations in many ways. Both courses are designed to provide students with an understanding of how to communicate within particular contexts and to develop an awareness of cultural issues as they relate to speech and other nonverbal forms of communication. The Spanish class, of course, is looking at these issues through the lens of Spanish language and culture, but many of the underlying principles and goals are the same. For this reason, the pair did not necessarily need to revise their course documents extensively to show how their course content was going to intersect.

Both courses also relied less on co-created documents and assignment sheets because they each made extensive use of textbooks that provided activity sections, quizzes, and discussion prompts. They did not need many additional course documents that were unique to the learning community class because the students worked within the textbook for the majority of the assignments. The speech instructor also preferred a hardcopy textbook, while the Spanish instructor more frequently made use of the e-book version and its accompanying technology. These preferences further contributed to a tendency to keep materials

separate. Larger assignments, including speeches, included handouts with more comprehensive directions, but each instructor was able to use the handouts created for their non-learning community courses.

Implementing the Learning Community

When observing this course, the instructors interacted much like the other pairs did while co-teaching. The class period I observed was one of the scheduled instances when both instructors would be in the classroom. It took place during the designated speech class hour and the Spanish instructor was considered to be making a "guest appearance." During this particular class period they were discussing the various communication styles that occur in different cultures. While the speech instructor stood at the front of the room and delivered a mix of lecture and activity facilitation, the Spanish instructor sat in the front of the classroom at the far side. Because Spanish-speaking cultures were frequently discussed throughout the chapter being covered in the textbook, the Spanish instructor was able to frequently interject and provide additional commentary alongside the speech instructor's lesson. Several times she directly asked him questions to obtain his input on information relating to social and cultural cues in Spanish-speaking countries.

Even though the class occurred during the scheduled speech course timeframe, and the Spanish instructor was considered the "guest" instructor, they both asked questions of each other, interjected with new information, and

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responded to student contributions. Like the collaborative style of the art and geology pair, this pair's interactions in class allowed them to model learning community behaviors for their students, such as asking questions, contributing to the conversation, and making knowledge connections between the materials.

Although each instructor was mainly responsible for their classroom content throughout the semester, there were additional times outside of class where they attempted to enhance students' learning through extra tutoring and practice. Both instructors would sometimes come early or stay late to attend part of their partner's class in order to build in informal times with students for practice on pronunciation or coaching on speech presentation. When the students had presentations in Spanish, the speech instructor would offer extra assistance to help them prepare for the delivery aspect of the speech. While this kind of extra assistance is common for many non-learning community faculty as well, this extra engagement with students also allowed the instructors to sit down with each other and share concerns on student progress. According to both instructors, this became an invaluable aspect of the learning community, as it enabled them to collaboratively come up with better solutions to help certain students and address common problems between the two courses.

Overall, the speech and Spanish community follows what might be considered the most traditional model of learning community implementation by maintaining separate class times and schedules. This worked well for their

particular courses in terms of content, but it also made it easier to plan and implement the community because they only needed to look for a few opportunities to integrate their content instead of attempting to do it on a daily or weekly basis.

The Literature and History Learning Community

Like the other communities on campus, these two instructors met informally during a campus event. While discussing a colleague's impending fellowship in Gettysburg, they discovered they both shared a passion for Civil War-era studies. The history instructor's background is in Southern history and the English instructor's background is in Southern literature, so they both believed they could collaborate on a learning community that shows the intersection of these two fields and areas of specialty.

Although the formation of this team was organic, like the other pairs, this learning community is different from the others in this study because it is one team-taught course instead of two separate courses that are linked together. Team-taught courses are not uncommon in the honors program at this institution, but they are rare within the majority non-honors courses. Even though these kinds of communities are not two courses linked by curriculum, the only real differences are the administrative logistics (one instructor is teaching it as part of their regular course load and one is teaching it as an overload) and the number of credit hours received by students. Like more traditional learning communities, team-taught

courses still consist of two instructors from different disciplines coming together to collaboratively plan and implement curriculum that addresses the content of their respective fields.

The pair offers a two-semester sequence of American Literature 1 and American Literature 2. The American Literature 1 course is a sophomore-level course typically offered in the fall that focuses on the literature and history of the Civil War. At the time of my interview and class observation, they were teaching the American Literature 2 course, which is a sophomore-level American literature course that focuses on both the historical and literary implications of the post-reconstruction era of the New South. However, during the interview they discussed the creation and implementation of both courses. As they described it, the roll out of the American Literature 2 courses was fairly easy because they had already figured out what worked and what did not when planning the American Literature 1 course.

Planning for the Learning Community

Like the other pairs, they spent several semesters preparing to launch the first American Literature 1 course they co-taught, and three semesters after they first talked about collaborating they were finally ready to market the course and put it on the schedule. Both instructors attribute the three semesters of planning, organizing, and getting to know each other better to the continued success of the course. They also took extra time before launching the course to market the class

to students and foster interest in the course—a vital component of ensuring the class meets the enrollment threshold for staying on the schedule. According to the English instructor, because of these efforts, the course filled two days after registration opened. Whereas the other learning communities were sometimes unsure if they would get the minimum number of students to proceed with the class, the fact that students did not need to register for two courses in the case of the literature/history community also played a role in their ability to keep the class on the schedule.

Another important part of their planning phase was deciding what kind of textbook, if any, to use for the course. According to the English instructor, they considered using a standard American literature anthology but ultimately decided that it would not be cost-effective to the students because they only planned to use the material relating to Southern literature and the Civil War. There was also no textbook that could incorporate historical documents to the extent they were hoping. This led them to abandon a textbook altogether and instead collaborate to curate a selection of short stories, poems, novel excerpts, essays, interviews, newspaper clippings, film clips, and songs that would be freely available to students and accessible via Blackboard. The only required text not provided by the instructors in the American Literature 2 course was the novel *All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren.

When choosing which texts in particular to use, the pair decided on a thematic approach versus a chronological approach, which reflected the pattern of a literature course over a history course. According to the history instructor, they wanted to focus on content related to three categories of people—slaves, soldiers, and women. Their decision to use a variety of selected texts over a textbook was an important decision because it helped them achieve the goal of unifying their two subjects. As the English instructor explained, "we wanted to have seamlessness of the history and lit. What we didn't want students to see was, now we are talking history and now we are talking lit. We wanted it seamless." For the pair, this meant that no text in particular would be dominant or more important, even though it was listed as a literature course—the non-literary historical documents were given equal weight to the short stories, poems, and novels. This helped them emphasize the way literature is shaped by the social, political, and cultural context and how, in turn, literature works to change or reinforce public opinions and shape the very society that created it.

Developing Course Documents and Activities

Even though the instructors wanted to present their material "seamlessly," they still acknowledged that the conventions and expectations of an English literature class would be prioritized over the disciplinary conventions of history. Because American Literature 1 and 2 are officially English courses, the ICRs contain a good deal of content from the English instructor's existing ICRs.

However, the course description for the American Literature 2 course also makes clear that students "will focus on the literature in conjunction with the history of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement." The ICR also heavily emphasizes the importance of class discussions, which, they believed, indicated that the class would not be conducted in the style of a typical history course. This was confirmed by the history instructor, who stated during the interview that his non-learning community courses were heavier on lecture than the English instructor's typical classes, and they wanted students to be aware that this course would emphasize more interaction than was typical of his lecture-based history courses. The document also states that MLA format, the preferred style for literary studies, is the only acceptable style for citations and documentation in the assignments students submit.

When it came time to consider rubrics, the pair decided they would only use a rubric on the final paper. The English instructor already had a rubric she used for a literary analysis essay in her non-learning community classes. Because they felt the rubric met the needs of assessing the final paper, they did not make changes to it and simply used it as it was. They decided not to develop rubrics for the other assignments because, as the history instructor felt, "it would allow [them] the freedom to write comments and make suggestions." The English instructor agreed when she described rubrics as "too limiting in some cases."

Implementing the Learning Community

Because they co-teach one course, the model requires both instructors to be present for all class periods unless something unforeseen keeps one of them away. This enables an intense focus on the intersection between history and literature and the way a variety of texts from that era both shaped and were shaped by the social and cultural issues of the time because the students are not learning from one instructor one day and the other the next. This is one benefit of the team-taught model over the traditional two-course learning community. While the instructors in a two-course learning community can certainly choose to share the classroom space for both classes, they are not required to follow that model. When team-teaching, it is more or less a requirement. As a result, the team teaching model has had a profound impact on the history instructor's approach to pedagogy and the discipline of history. According to the history instructor, team teaching and working with instructors from different fields has allowed him to more fully realize that "history is not this one thing over here—it is made up of all these other disciplines that bleed into it." He also believes "this benefits students too because a lot of times they just think, well, if this is composition what I'm learning is just good for composition. They don't think about transferring those concepts to writing papers for history." This blending of material, then, requires both of them to inhabit the roles of historian and literary critic. He explains:

We look at historical documents, writing and the like, through both a

literary and historical lens…I think from the historian's perspective,

especially if you want to do cultural history, you have to not just look at

things as a historian. You have to be familiar with literary criticism and

the like. The history aspect comes from trying to understand the context

from which the document was written and the background of the author

and things of that nature. But as far as the actual reading and

understanding and breaking down of the document from a literary

perspective, from my perspective it seems to kind of flow seamlessly.

This is another benefit of sharing the classroom space for all class periods. As

they explain it, they are able to simultaneously look at documents and provide

commentary and analysis that is informed by the comments the other is making.

This further enables the instructors to achieve a "seamless" course because their

lectures and discussions occur together in real time.

The writing component of the course is also implemented collaboratively

because both instructors share the responsibility of commenting on and grading

student papers. While they acknowledge there are some disciplinary differences in

writing, they shares most of the same standards for what constitutes appropriate

written communication in their course. According to the history instructor, "when

it comes to expectations we basically have the same expectation so that make it

much easier. Good writing is good writing regardless of whether I'm looking at it

as a historian." She agreed that, "good writing is good writing, and you can tell when a student has it and when they are a little weak in areas. We agree, you know. We've had to sometimes talk it out and go, 'well, I think this or I think that.' We will let it ferment and come back to it and then it becomes fresh again." However, the historian also feels it is important to ultimately defer to the English instructor on matters of writing because the course is officially an English course. Even though they collaborate closely on the grading of papers and projects, he acknowledges that, "when they are writing their papers, I understand it is not a history paper that is going to be written with Chicago style citations."

Like the art and geology community, this pair also believes that their disciplinary differences require different methods of presenting information to students. When asked about the content delivery of the course, the history instructor explained how their content areas necessitated slightly different approaches:

My style is primarily lecture style because from the historical perspective before you can think deeply about things, you first have to have some cursory knowledge of what you are talking about. So, I give that through lecture. Her style is much more conversational. Asking them questions and getting feedback. I can't do that because I can't ask them a question about some aspect of, say, Jim Crow laws if they don't know what those are in the first place. I have to deliver that basic information. There is that

difference in style, but I think that ends up working because they get that

complimentary style…Even when I have a lecture, she will interject, and

then maybe the students say something, and then I'll add too.

Ultimately, this learning community emphasizes both the similarities and

differences in their fields by reinforcing the intersection of literature and history

even while presenting their information differently.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

This chapter makes sense of the data presented in chapter four by discussing how the data address my initial research questions and providing an analysis of the instructors' collaborative practices through the lens of third generation activity theory. While chapter four introduced the instructors and the information gathered through data collection, this chapter applies the framework of third generation activity theory to that information in order to argue for the significance of what is occurring both inside and outside the classroom as these instructors collaborate and engage with their partners.

My original research question was two-fold. What do the collaborative practices of learning community faculty look like and do these collaborative experiences provide opportunities for faculty to engage in discipline-based metacognitive reflection? My secondary research question addresses the student perspective and attempts to better understand if the development of metacognitive reflection in instructors ultimately benefits students inside and outside the learning community. After interviewing and observing these learning communities at the research site, it is clear there are several important implications regarding the inner-workings of this pedagogical model and the experience it provides for faculty and students alike. The first sections of this chapter will address those faculty experiences, and in the final section I will turn

my attention to the ways faculty collaboration and interdisciplinary learning shape the experiences of learning community students.

<u>Collaborative Practices and Third Generation Activity Theory</u>

My time interviewing and observing these learning community instructors provided me the opportunity to better understand how faculty collaborate across disciplinary lines and what kind of knowledge making is actually taking place when this collaboration occurs. This section will discuss the collaborative practices of learning community faculty using third generation activity theory as a framework. Specifically, this section will focus on the concepts of objects, which are goals and motives, tools, roles, and division of labor as points of analysis within third generation activity theory. These points of analysis will then be applied to the information gathered in the data collection phase of this project. Returning to the language of activity theory is helpful in interrogating these collaborative practices because learning communities are two activity systems merging to create a new system, and the language of activity theory enables us to explain the relationships and activity occurring in these communities in meaningful ways. The most important development of third generation activity theory is the inclusion of multiple activity systems, which necessitates considering the overlap of the systems' goals and motives, as this place of overlap produces a new, shared object.

Returning to Marcovich and Shinn's claims regarding interdisciplinary interaction is also useful to this discussion, as they argue that the coexistence of disciplines in the same space does not lead to either the fusion or disappearance of the respective disciplines—the merging of activity systems does not mean the old systems have dissolved. The disciplines continue to serve as "home referents," and for an individual engaging in interdisciplinary work, "it is the discipline from which he issues; back to which he returns; and it is the discipline that provides a practitioner with a set of coordinates that determines his course and his identity" (588). In this way, an instructor's "home referent" is the activity system (or discipline) that represents their half of the learning community.

On the other hand, we also cannot say that these are just two disciplines working together tangentially because the collaboration occurring in learning communities often goes beyond a surface level collaboration. While the instructors' disciplines remain an important stabilizing force in their collaborative work, I argue that learning communities allow them to create a new space where their activity systems of origin "neither fuse nor disappear." Instead, the two activity systems meet and speak to one another in order to create a new community of practice. This kind of collaboration requires the creation of a new space that brings in the tools and practices of the disciplines and transforms them for the new purposes of the interdisciplinary endeavor. As faculty work together across disciplines, they create new systems that also create new, shared goals and

motives. In this way, they bring the tools and conventions from their original

disciplines, but those tools and conventions get transformed and changed to

accommodate the needs of the new system, or what Russell refers to as the

"appropriation" of tools from one system to another.

Creating New Objects/Goals/Motivations

This creation of new objects and goals is the starting point for analyzing

the kind of activity taking place within learning communities because, as

Engestrom argues, "objects are concerns; they are generators and foci of attention,

motivation, effort, and meaning" (303) As a result, identifying these objects is the

first step in attempting to understand why the instructors choose particular tools,

how they decide to use them, and what roles they take on as they participate in the

community.

While traditional classroom models rely on the long-established goals and

motives of disciplinary activity systems (i.e. when one is teaching an art class, the

discipline has already worked to define what the goals and motives of that activity

is and one can plan his or her teaching accordingly), learning communities require

instructors to consider the motives and goals of their discipline, their partner's

discipline, and then the new system created through the merging of the two

disciplines. Of course, the tacit goal and motive within higher education is always

generating new knowledge or furthering understanding of a discipline's "ways of

knowing and doing." However, individual courses, as activity systems

themselves, always create new goals and motives that are specific to that group of subjects (students and teacher combined). Similarly, learning communities create new goals and motives that are specific to their particular groups in that particular time.

There are several ways this study attempted to identify the objects of these learning communities. First, discovering what these new objects are can partially be attained through the information supplied on the ICRs, as each one has a section that outlines the focus of the course. The art and geology ICR mentions that the course format is meant to "demonstrate a relationship between science and the arts." The literature and history ICR describes the goal of the course as "focus[ing] on literature in conjunction with the history of the civil war." Finally, the speech and Spanish ICR describes the courses as "combined" and emphasizes intercultural competency and communication as the focus of the community.

But reading ICR focus statements does not always give a full picture of what motivates instructors to pursue the learning community model, and listening to what they have to say about why they chose to create the learning communities in the first place can add depth to the statements made on the ICRs. When discussing what they wanted students to learn or accomplish after participating in the learning communities, the instructors all expressed the desire to enable students to think about the knowledge connections between the learning community courses and be able to apply the skills and information from one

course to the other and throughout the rest of the education. What they hinted at in the ICRs (the relationship and connection between their disciplinary content), they were able to more fully articulate within the interviews. For example, the art and geology instructors wanted to introduce students to the ways art and environmental science connect and how art can be used to enhance the practices of environmental science. They wanted to show students that these seemingly disparate fields have a lot to learn from one another, and that knowledge in one area can enhance one's understanding of the other. The goals and motives of the original activity systems of art appreciation and environmental science give way to the new goals and motives of the learning community activity system. This requires a questioning of what it is art and science are both attempting to accomplish through the activities of the disciplines and how those goals can be brought into harmony with one another.

This is also true for the other communities observed in this study, as the instructors had to work with their partners to determine the new objects of their learning community courses. For the speech and Spanish partnership, the learning community established intercultural communication as the primary focus of the community through the ICR, but when speaking about this topic during the interview, they elaborated to discuss the importance of intercultural competency and the necessity to be able to communicate better in an increasingly global and multicultural society. While this goal referred back to some of the goals of their

non-learning community courses, the pair worked together to establish a distinctly new object of activity that was unique to the learning community. Similarly, the goal of the literature and history community was to develop an understanding of Civil War and Southern literature through the lens of the historical context in which it occurred. They wanted to bring to the forefront the concept of intertextuality, and the idea that texts are always in response to the environment and conditions in which they are created.

Rethinking and Appropriating Tools

In addition to thinking through the goals and motives of their new communities, instructors must consider the nature of and expectations for tool use in their respective disciplines. As instructors work to create learning communities across disciplines that are traditionally highly segregated, they are creating new communities that require new rhetorical and disciplinary considerations and a rethinking of the ways tools are used to accomplish the group's goals. When faculty collaborate to create interdisciplinary curriculum, they must assess their own disciplinary conventions, discourses, and values, but then they must recontextualize them to determine how they fit into the new model of the learning community. Learning communities are unique pedagogical models in this way because they create a new community of practice that comes to have specific needs and expectations different from regular, non-learning community courses. If instructors want to accomplish the new goals and motives of their learning

communities and show their students the intersections of their fields, it requires the appropriation of tools from both disciplines in order to transform them for the purposes of the learning community. This process of tool appropriation can be seen when the instructors work together to construct and revise course documents and supplies and select textbooks and reading materials.

The intersection of art and geology tools in classroom and lab settings is particularly interesting to examine because there is not a lot to draw on in terms of other communities modeling these practices. The instructors were constantly looking for new ways to integrate their classes, and much of this had to be done as the course progressed because they were not always aware of how to appropriate one another's tools until they were in the classroom working together. In addition to the creation of the assignments and projects discussed in chapter four, the geology and art instructors found several ways to integrate the tools of their original activity systems. For example, when the art instructor first introduced the geology instructor to the art lab spaces, he realized that the materials used in the clay lab could be broken down and presented to students according to their mineral makeups. The informal "recipe" used to make the clay could be transformed into a formal lesson on the identification and interaction of these various minerals. Traditionally, rocks and minerals are used in a specific context in the non-learning community geology courses; they are used to help students identify minerals, learn about sedimentation, and understand the geologic

processes that create stratification within rock samples. In the art appreciation course, these same tools could be used to show how pre-historic people used the surrounding rocks and minerals to make primitive paints. However, the art instructor never considered doing this before the geology instructor pointed out the possibility of transforming a common tool from his discipline into a tool that could be used to accomplish the new, shared goal of their learning community.

The specimen model creation and contour map assignment is another important example of tool appropriation in the art and geology learning community, as the instructors were able to recognize that the tools in the clay lab could be recontextualized for use in a project on contour mapping and topography. Pieces made in the clay lab are generally artistic in nature and generally not viewed as tools for scientific inquiry. However, as the instructors looked for ways to synthesize lab projects, they determined that the art pieces made in the clay lab could, in fact, be used to teach about the geologic activity of contouring and topography. The geology instructor even encouraged the creation of art pieces for the project instead of insisting upon life-like renderings of the volcano and the specimens.

Similarly, the literature and history course needed to appropriate and recontextualize tools in order to create a set of readings for the course. While historical documents are tools used to mediate the activity of regular, non-learning community history classes, they became an important tool for mediating the

activity of the combined literature and history community. As described in chapter four, the instructors spent a significant amount of time identifying the tools from each of their activity systems and determining which could prove useful in their carefully curated selection of texts for the course. Because the course is listed as an English course, both instructors felt it was appropriate to use assignment sheets and documents originally created by the English instructor and simply modify them for the purposes of the community. However, they believed that the readings and artifacts presented to students needed to come from both disciplines in order to truly show the intersection of these two fields of study. This meant they would have to go through the process of evaluating and selecting artifacts because there simply was no textbook that could properly mediate the activity of the class.

While identifying, selecting, and adapting the tools from each discipline is an important step for instructors, this process also depends on the level of collaboration in which a pair is willing to engage. The speech and Spanish pair used the least amount of tool appropriation and recontextualization because they chose to keep much of their materials separate, primarily for convenience and ease of planning. When they did share materials, the tool use was not as transformative because of the relative closeness of their content. When the speech instructor applied her rubrics to the speeches made in the Spanish class, she only

needed to make minor adjustments to accommodate the expectations of the

Spanish instructor.

Defining Roles and Division of Labor

Two additional important aspects of third generation activity theory are

roles and division of labor, and these terms refer to the way the various subjects in

the activity system view themselves in relation to the rest of the group. Roles are a

particularly important part of third generation activity theory because they help us

to position ourselves within the context of an activity and understand how various

subject positions are dependent upon one another for the successful functioning of

the group. Identifying roles also lends to an analysis of power dynamics and

hierarchies within groups. Using activity theory to analyze roles that exist within

learning communities is useful because the merging of two activity systems to

create the new system of the learning community necessitates rearticulating

traditional classroom roles and defining the division of labor. Through my

observations of instructors interacting with one another, it is clear that faculty

collaboration in this context requires an articulation of the division of labor and

transforms the role of the instructor, especially within the classroom.

In observing these learning communities, it quickly became apparent that

participation in the community changes the instructors' subject positions by

changing the power dynamics. Most instructors are used to being the sole arbiter

of authority in their classrooms. Even in "decentered" classrooms, instructors still

have the final word on how the course operates, what gets included in the curriculum, and how they assess the work produced by students. Learning community participation does not have an effect on all of those aspects of the instructor role and their ability to make decisions, but it changes the subject positions of instructors when they share classroom space. When sharing classroom space, their subject positions can change dramatically, and more than once, over the course of a class period or the semester as a whole. This is evidenced from the fact that all the learning community instructors reported taking on a learner role at various points in time. They all realized that participating in the community meant they would not always embody the subject position of teacher. In many instances, they had to actively participate as a learner by asking questions and learning new information about their partner's content.

Taking on these new roles allowed for the continued success of the learning communities because it made it possible for the instructors to actively think about what they know regarding their content and then consider what they do not know about their partner's content. This reflection enabled the instructors to come up with new ideas about how to combine their course content and create new opportunities for collaboration. In the case of the art and geology community, this embodiment of roles was vital to developing and implementing the courses. As both instructors indicated in their interview, they did not always know at the beginning of the semester how their content was going to pair. There were too

many aspects of each other's courses they were not familiar with, and it was not possible to account for all of those aspects during the pre-semester planning phase. It also common for instructors to improvise within lectures or allow student questions and concerns to direct the tenor of in-class conversations. As the course progressed, and each partner took turns becoming a learner, they were able to discover existing connections between their courses and also forge new connections that they had not previously seen considered elsewhere.

This rearticulating of roles within the classroom was most prominent with the art and geology pair because they felt they needed more time and more opportunities to learn about the other discipline than the other pairs did. Fall 2016 was also their first real experience working together, so much of their collaboration depended on the learning they each did in the classroom. In contrast, the other two pairs had more experience working together, and this lessened the demand for such dramatic role transformations. The speech instructor had previously audited the Spanish instructor's class, and was familiar with most of the content and expectations for the course. The history and literature instructors both had experience working in cross-disciplinary settings before creating their learning community, and also had more knowledge of each other's disciplines before collaborating with each other.

Despite the fact that not all the pairs needed to embody the learner role extensively, they all engaged in this role reversal to some extent during the classes

I observed. In each class, one instructor maintained the teacher role at a given time by delivering a lecture and course content while the other instructor sat, listened, asked questions, and participated in the activities with students. However, this did not mean that the instructors took on the role of a student entirely. In a way, the collaboration that occurs within the learning community seems to create new roles within the group that are not always prevalent outside the learning community. The instructors, while inhabiting the learner subject position, don't necessarily embody the student subject position as they still have more authority and expertise when in their learner role. This new learner role is, in a sense, an intermediary position between instructor and student that allows the instructors to learn, ask questions, and make new knowledge connections all while maintaining their position as expert and instructor.

Finally, division of labor is a component of third generation activity theory worth applying to the analysis of learning community development because the division of labor is an important part of instructors' collaborative practices, especially when it comes to grading and delivering course content. It is not surprising that division of labor within learning communities tends to fall along disciplinary lines. This is because, to return to Marcovich and Shinn's argument, their disciplines are the "home referents" to which they continually return. For this reason, it is easier, and simply more comfortable, to maintain separate grading processes for most learning community faculty. Coordinating grading

efforts may be less cumbersome in team-taught courses because they can share a gradebook in Blackboard, but for the faculty working in linked courses, it does not make sense to collaborate on grading efforts because only a handful of assignments or activities count for a grade in both classes.

Division of labor also looks different across the learning communities due to the different levels of connection between the courses in each community. Because the team-taught course is one course and not two linked courses, the instructors are able to share the responsibilities of lecturing for one class period nearly equally. They discuss the basic overview of each class period or unit in order to determine what content needs to be covered, then they make plans for their part of the class period separately, then they come together and determine how they are going to present the content through a mixture of lecturing, discussions, and activities. The linked course learning communities follow a similar pattern, but they each end up being responsible for more material because they do not share the responsibility of lecturing on the same subject. A team-taught course is also only a 3 credit hour course, and the linked courses constitute 6 credit hours for the students. In the case of the art and geology community, one of the instructors will lecture or lead an activity and then the other will take a turn lecturing or leading an activity. While they are able to divide the work of lecturing and facilitating overall, they are still responsible for their own part of the class that relates to art or geology.

Ultimately, third generation activity theory provides a framework for analyzing these learning communities because it sheds light on the nature of faculty collaboration and allows us to understand how the various tools, roles, and division of labor contribute to the overall realization of the goals and motives established through the merging of two disciplines. Understanding how goals and motives, tool use, roles, and division of labor shape the learning community then allows me to then identify ways this kind of engagement do or do not create opportunities for discipline-based metacognitive reflection.

Learning Community Participation and Metacognitive Reflection

In addition to mapping the collaborative practices of learning community faculty at this research site, this study attempts to determine if this pedagogical model allows for faculty to actively reflect on their own disciplinary conventions and expectations when engaging with their learning community partners. So, are faculty more self-aware regarding their disciplinary identity, their "ways of knowing and doing," after collaborating across disciplines within the context of a learning community? When I considered the possible outcomes of this study before it started, I anticipated that it would be fairly easy to see that learning community participation either did or did not foster the kind of reflective practices I was looking for. However, after working with the study participants I have come to understand that it is not necessarily possible, at least in this case, to answer that

question with a simple yes or no because, in the specific context of this research site, the answer is both.

Learning community engagement certainly does allow faculty to reflect on their own practices as they go through the process of collaborating with someone from a different discipline, and this is apparent because instructors in this study reported that the learning community participation opened their eyes to the things they valued and allowed them to reconsider the content and conventions they most wanted to include in the course. They actively had to consider the "deal breakers" when it came to curriculum planning, and this processes of reassessing and seeing their curriculum with fresh eyes enabled them to reflect on the disciplinary content and conventions that instructors tend to become blind to over time.

Becoming blind to our own content and conventions is partly a product of current "silo" mentalities because we are rarely asked to take stock of our curriculum as it relates to other disciplines or attempt to understand what our own "ways of knowing and doing" look like through the eyes of those outside our own fields. When opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration occur, there is the potential to challenge these mindsets and re-envision what we do as teachers and as members of our disciplines. To illustrate this, all of the instructors in this study have been teaching for significant periods of time and have settled into an established curriculum for the courses they teach. This is not to say they never

make changes to their regular courses by adding, subtracting, or altering

assignments and rubrics—like most of us, they simply have established and

familiar material that they return to each semester when teaching their classes.

However, when they decided to form learning communities with their colleagues,

each instructor had to reassess their curriculum from top to bottom, even if they

did not need to actually make substantive changes to it in order to make the

learning community function. While they were not all creating entirely new

courses to teach, they were creating new courses in the sense that they had to

reconsider their goals and intended outcomes in relation to their partners' courses.

Co-creating the curriculum required the instructors to ask themselves what was

most important to them as experts in their particular fields and decide what kind

of assignments and activities were non-negotiable in order for students to

successfully complete the course.

It is also true, however, that this activity of curriculum reassessment in the

context of the learning community is an on-going process that can take multiple

semesters. In some cases the instructors did not realize what these "deal breakers"

were until after the course was completed and they decided something important

was missing. This was true of every learning community pair as they progressed

through their first semester teaching together. Even though they went through a

process of curriculum assessment prior to the start of the learning community, it

was impossible for them to know how everything would play out over the course

of the semester, and trial and error was sometimes the only reasonable strategy for discovering what assignments and activities would best accomplish the goals of the community. This is clear in the case of the speech instructor who felt she needed to eliminate the researched speech in order to accommodate the Spanish content. After the semester was over, she decided it was not an option for her to leave that assignment out in future versions of the learning community. It was too important an assignment for helping students learn about structure, source integrity, and source integration. Eliminating this assignment ended up giving her a deeper appreciation for it and the outcomes it produces for students, and this kind of reflection enabled her to reemphasize this assignment in her non-learning community courses and to go back to the drawing board when it came to planning curriculum with her partner.

It is apparent that this kind of interdisciplinary engagement requires instructors to consider disciplinary conventions and expectations for the course, and that means they are actively reflecting in a way that helps builds a self-awareness of their disciplinary identity. When discussing why the instructors decided to make certain choices regarding curriculum and assignments, they were all able to articulate the idea that they made their choices as representatives of their disciplines. None of them believed their expectations and disciplinary conventions were inherently correct—instead, they all acknowledged that they made decisions when planning and implementing the learning communities

because it allowed them to communicate what it meant to be an artist, or a historian, or a Spanish speaker. They also recognized that sometimes the conventions and expectations of their own disciplines needed to take a backseat to their partners' expectations when a new rhetorical situation presented itself.

On the other hand, determining whether instructors truly become more self-aware from their learning community participation becomes more complicated considering the nature of the answers I received through the interviews. Even though instructors are clearly engaging in a curriculum assessment process that requires them to consider the goals, motives, and tool use of their disciplines, I do not think that participating in learning communities automatically gives instructors the opportunity to meaningfully externalize the rationale for the decisions they make, which is an important aspect of building self-awareness. Externally rationalizing our decisions to others, especially those outside our disciplines, can be an important layer of reflection because it helps solidify our understanding of why we do what we do and how it influences and shapes those around us. Instructors within higher education are often assessing and reassessing their own practices as they discover assignments and activities that do or not help students learn. But we have fewer opportunities to actually explain those decisions to others and receive feedback on the way we design and implement curriculum. As a result, we often rely on our own intuition or our understanding of disciplinarity to decide what would work best in the classroom.

While this added layer of externalizing decisions can help instructors reflect more deeply, it appears possible that learning community instructors could collaborate without ever having to rationalize their decisions to one another. This could be due to several factors. First, the faculty partners trust one another. When one decided they needed to include a particular assignment or use a certain rubric, the other instructor in the pair did not feel the need to question the other's decision. In the interviews, all of the pairs explained that they rarely, if ever, had to disagree about how or why to include certain material or how to assess it. None of them talked about having to convince their partner that an assignment or activity was necessary. They simply knew that if their partner believed certain material was important, it should be included. There is a certain deference paid to disciplinary identity and expertise because both parties view each other as the curriculum and instruction experts in their respective fields. While this may be true, this idea can also work to prevent close scrutiny of each other's curriculum decisions from an outside perspective.

Another reason the instructors rarely discussed a need to externally rationalize their choices is because a lot of the assignments in learning communities are assessed separately. This also relates back to the idea of showing deference to one another and respecting disciplinary knowledge and expertise. In some cases it is very obvious why instructors would choose to separately grade student work. The speech instructor, as an intermediate Spanish speaker, is not in

a position to assess students on Spanish-language speaking and writing skills in the same way as the Spanish instructor. Nor does she need to do that in order for their learning community to function properly. However, even in the case of assignments and activities that have been merged to reflect the interests of both disciplines, it is often easier to keep separate gradebooks out of convenience. For this reason, the speech and Spanish and art and geology instructors had very little interaction when it came to assignment assessment because the students were, in the end, getting two grades—one for each of the courses. In the case of the contour map/clay specimen assignment in the art and geology community, the art instructor evaluated their clay modeling and sculpting techniques and then passed the assignment on to the geology instructor, who gave it a second grade based on the contour mapping aspect of the activity.

The one exception to separate grading was in the team-taught course, as the history and literature instructors both graded student writing and made comments one the same student essays. However, they indicated that there was rarely disagreement about the quality of the essays and they were able to easily come to similar conclusions regarding grades. Their educational backgrounds most likely play a role in this, though, as both had upper-level or graduate coursework in English and history. This could also explain the comments made in the interview when they discussed their expectations for assessing student work. As the history instructor stated: "when it comes to expectations we basically have

the same expectation so that make it much easier. Good writing is good writing regardless of whether I'm looking at it as a historian." The English instructor agreed that, "good writing is good writing, and you can tell when a student has it and when they are a little weak in areas. We agree, you know." These statements of course, should be problematized from a writing-in-the-disciplines standpoint, as research in that area has shown that writing is a deeply contextual activity, and the production of "good writing" in those contexts is dependent on a writer's attunement to the specific rhetorical situation at hand.

When the instructors were asked to elaborate on what they meant by "good writing," they both cited "clear, logical reasoning" and "logical construction" as two of the more important factors in grading student papers. They also both agreed that they were looking for students to provide responses and viewpoints that went beyond "simplistic" or "stock" answers. Again, however, it is important to note that these two instructors have closer educational backgrounds than the other two pairs of instructors, and this could be a factor in their tendency to agree on what "logical reasoning" and "logical construction" look like. Nevertheless, they did report times when they were uncertain about how to proceed with a grade and they "had to sometimes talk it out and go, 'well, I think this or I think that.'" However, one area of assessment the history instructor left more to the literature instructor was grammar. He felt less comfortable assessing that but acknowledged it was important for the overall grade on

assignments in that class. In his non-learning community classes, he considered it less of a factor in essay assessment.

While collaborative grading seems to be more feasible in a team-taught course such as the history and literature class, it could still be an important and beneficial activity for instructors to attempt, even if it is only used as an exercise in understanding one's partner and their approach to assessing content and conventions. It is possible that the level of engagement required for coming to agreement on assessments and grades of student work may have led to the kind of negotiation that requires more externalization of decisions. It could also help instructors determine if their ideas about assessing student work are different in the context of the learning community, as the act of collaborating on grades with the literature instructor allowed the history instructor to more fully realize that grammar is less important to him in the non-learning community courses he teaches.

Although the question of disciplinary reflection and self-awareness was more complicated than I anticipated, I do believe, at the very least, the kind of faculty collaboration occurring within these learning communities lays the groundwork for deeper metacognitive reflection, even if it is not sufficiently capable of causing discipline-based metacognitive reflection by itself. This is because the instructors used the interviews as processing experiences and were able to make meaning from their collaborative experiences when they answered

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the interview questions with their partner. Thus, it was the research intervention that stimulated critical reflection and prompted instructors to externalize their thought processes and decision making rationales. Even though they had engaged in collaborative processes that required them to rethink, reassess, and reconsider their own disciplinary practices, they did not always have to articulate those ideas to others. When confronted with interview questions that prompted them to verbalize and explain their reflections, they often took a few extra seconds to think before speaking or passed the question off to their partner if they felt they were not able to answer it right away. This was most apparent when I asked the following question: "as you work with someone who is from a different field and does things differently, has that allowed you to think about how your field approaches knowledge and instruction?" It was not that the instructors could not answer this question, but it took them more time to answer because it deals with the "why" of their disciplines and not just the "what." Their experiences working in an interdisciplinary context allowed them to answer this question, but because it had never been explicitly posed to them before they did not feel immediately prepared to fully respond. It was much easier for them to discuss other questions regarding what they did in the classroom and how they worked together. They needed more time to consider the "why" because rarely are they asked to explain why they do things as members of their disciplines. This is an example of the Hawthorne effect at work in this study, as participant responses were clearly due

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in part to their awareness of the research intervention. As a result, it is not possible to conclude that participants would have engaged in the same level of reflection had they not participated in the study.

Despite the fact that the research intervention played an important role in stimulating critical reflection, I do not think this negates the idea that learning community participation can help foster discipline-based metacognitive reflection. If, as Russell and Carter believe, our highly segregated disciplinary activities have allowed us to internalize the values and conventions of ours fields, then participating in learning communities at least helps move those internalized understandings a little closer to the surface by providing instructors with experiences they can draw on to more fully understand and articulate their disciplinary identities. Providing instructors with opportunities for further reflection, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, seems to be important additional layer for helping actually bring these internalized understandings to the surface.

Creating Interdisciplinary Environments for Students

If metacognitive reflection is to be understood as an important practice for faculty to engage in, it is also necessary to understand how instructors' reflective practices, and interdisciplinary learning, actually benefit students. Previous research has shown that students thrive in learning community environments because they provide a sense of engagement, they make more lasting friendships

and connections with peers and faculty, and they feel a sense of belonging that is crucial for retaining students. These reasons alone can make learning communities a worthwhile endeavor. However, the kind of collaboration and engagement occurring between faculty partners also have direct benefits to students that can be observed, and these components of the learning communities sets them apart from other types of programs or initiatives that might be aimed at student retention and engagement.

One of the primary benefits of the learning community structure is the opportunity for making disciplinarity more visible. As Bartholomae suggests, students must learn to try on a number of voices and interpretive schemes when they enter into higher education. They must learn to adapt to various discourse communities and navigate between them throughout the course of their undergraduate studies. This can be a difficult task for students who are juggling multiple classes and struggling to make sense of the different ways of knowing and doing to which they are exposed. Learning communities can, in some ways, serve as bridges between these various discourse communities and allow students to see how different disciplines are in some ways similar and in some ways different—linking the courses together puts them right next to each for the purpose of comparing them. As the art and geology instructors discussed in their interview, sometimes they had to explain to the students that, even though they were merging their courses, there were still times when they would have to do

things differently. This allowed students to see that their different ways of approaching knowledge and truth would sometimes result in different ways of instructing or assessing student comprehension.

Moreover, simply possessing the knowledge that disciplines have different ways of knowing and doing is extremely empowering to students because it enables them to reflect on the ways their behaviors and practices may need to be altered depending on what they are learning in any given class. This idea, after all, is crucial to the arguments made by proponents of writing-in-the-disciplines pedagogy. As Bruffee argues, one of the biggest hurdles for students entering higher education is the ability to adapt to the "traditional or 'normal' conventions of the college classroom." To further complicate this, the fragmentation of the disciplines has led to a number of "normal" conventions to which students must adapt. Learning communities seem to help students understand this process of adaptation because the closeness with which faculty must collaborate highlights the similarities and differences in their disciplines and points to places where students must learn to adjust.

But learning communities also have the potential to take the concept of visible disciplinarity a step further and help students challenge the idea of disciplinarity altogether. What if the voices and interpretive schemes people traditionally think about when they think about academic disciplines are not the only ones available for them to try on? What if there are ways of knowing and

doing that can only be developed and discovered through interdisciplinary collaboration? What if some students only learn they are passionate about something once they are able to see that thing recontextualized through the lens of a discipline with which they are already familiar? Students need to learn to see the connections between the various conversations they are joining when they enter higher education, and they need to understand the various knowledge domains to which they are introduced as interrelated and dependent on one another. As advocates of learning communities have argued, students need to be able to solve problems that span disciplines and affect multiple areas of society. This is precisely what the AACU means when they claim that students "need wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary knowledge" and "a demonstrated ability to apply [that] knowledge to complex problems." Just as we are frequently finding new uses for material tools and transforming and recontextualizing them for new purposes, we must also be able to recontextualize knowledge and reconstruct it to serve the diverse rhetorical situations encountered inside and outside the classroom. Understanding how various disciplines approach problems, view knowledge, and construct meaning is at the very core of interdisciplinary thinking because it allows one to mine the ways of knowing and doing from several disciplines in order to find creative and novel solutions to problems. When faculty actively work together to present students with interdisciplinary learning

opportunities, students are able to engage in the kind of critical thinking that is at the very heart of higher education.

Another important benefit to students is the real-time modeling of interdisciplinary knowledge making faculty can offer to students when they collaborate inside the classroom. If social constructionists are correct when they argue that what we know, do, and believe are products of the interactions we have with our environments, then our model of schooling often fails at showing students what it looks like to truly make knowledge and meaning. As Paulo Freire asserts, traditional educational models tends to emphasize knowledge as transmission—as an objective reality that can be transferred from one mind to another through the correct use of language; the teacher transmits knowledge to the unknowing student. However, the learning community model denies this view of knowledge by putting the instructors into positions that enable them to model interdisciplinary meaning making in front of their students. As the instructors actively make knowledge connections between their content, students are able to understand that creating knowledge requires asking questions, and synthesizing one's existing knowledge domains with new information. It means experimenting to see what is possible and attempting to understand what went wrong when attempts at merging disciplinary activities fail.

This modeling of interdisciplinary knowledge making was evident in all three classroom observations. The instructors asked each other questions as they

discussed content and introduced activities. They would interject with anecdotes relating to their partner's lectures and make comments about how their partner's content might be approached from other perspectives. These kind of behaviors are powerful for students to see because it dismantles the notion that a teacher is the "sage on the stage" who is merely there to lecture and transmit information into empty student minds. Because the learning community atmosphere transforms the role of the instructor, it allows students to see what it looks like to create knowledge and develop meaning through the constant interplay of ideas and questions—quite a Dewian approach to knowledge. According to the interviews, in some instances during class, the instructors ended up in places they did not plan because they could not anticipate how their content would work together until they were in the classroom. In some respects, students were able to see what it looks like to plan and merge interdisciplinary curriculum—a process that normally occurs far away from students before the semester starts.

It is possible that the benefits of this will lessen over time the more the instructors work together and the process of discovering new ways to merge content wanes, but even a year into the art and geology partnership they report that they are still looking for new ways to merge the courses and develop interdisciplinary approaches to their content. In fall 2017 follow-up interview, the art instructor shared that they were finding new ways to merge their lectures. Previously, they took turns lecturing and each would look for ways to jump in

when appropriate. Now that they have worked together for over a year, they are comfortable enough to begin delivering shared lectures. In another follow-up, the literature and history instructors, the longest standing partnership in this study, explained that they recently launched a new linked-course learning community and are actively developing new assignments and activities to show the connections between a first-year composition course and an American history course. It is safe to say that the instructors who have a desire to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration with their colleagues do not let their course material get stagnant and this constant pursuit of new connections and meaning will continue to serve as a model of interdisciplinary knowledge making for future students.

While students within the learning community benefit greatly from the interdisciplinary context of the group and the ability to see faculty actively collaborating, students in non-learning community courses still see the benefits of faculty engagement with this model. All of the instructors in this study reported that the time they spent in the classroom with their partner allowed them to improve their non-learning community courses when they implemented the tools and strategies learned from their collaboration within the learning community. The learning community is not just a pet project that remains isolated from the rest of their work—it is powerful professional development that provides

opportunities to assess one's pedagogical practices and learn about new strategies for teaching in a variety of contexts.

For the speech instructor, collaborating with the Spanish instructor gave her ideas for her non-learning community class that she incorporated during the same semester the learning community was implemented. She says, "I have noticed this semester when I taught the chapter on language that I was bringing in some of the stuff about Spanish I wish I would have incorporated last semester…[it made] me more aware of how to incorporate some of that stuff into my everyday classes." Similarly, the Spanish instructor felt that watching the speech instructor's teaching habits and postures improved his own classroom persona. He says, "I learned from the speech class. It helped me in teaching and also in giving pointers to my students because I didn't realize it but I was learning from your class. I am learning, actually, how to be a better speaker and how to improve my teaching from the speech classes."

Teaching in the learning community also made the Spanish instructor change his expectations of students in his other classes. Before working with the speech instructor, he paid little attention to the delivery and structure of the speeches his students gave in class. His primary concern was correct Spanish language usage. However, after viewing students give speeches after they had been coached by the speech instructor, he became more interested in delivery and structure aspects, including the nonverbal cues and body language exhibited by

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the student speakers. He says he noticed "there was a big difference between our class and my other classes that were not in the learning community" because the learning community students "looked more professional" because of the extra coaching. This encouraged the Spanish instructor to bring these elements of professionalism to his non learning-community courses as he felt he had a new knowledge of how to communicate these expectations to his other students. This is an example of what Russell means when he explains that individuals are constantly moving between activity systems and bringing new tools and knowledge across borders. The students in the Spanish instructor's non-learning community courses now have an enhanced learning experience as well because he is able to take this new knowledge back to those classes and provide more well-rounded instruction in speaking and communicating in Spanish-language contexts. This helps to further reinforce what the non-learning community students have learned or will learn when they take a required speech communication course.

Similarly, the speech instructor reported having comparable revelations about body language and tone that she had not previously considered before listening to the Spanish instructor lecture. She said:

When [he was] speaking Spanish [he] said, 'watch my body language, watch my nonverbals to be able to figure out the meaning.' When we talked about nonverbal communication I was able to bring that back in and

say, 'if you don't understand the language, pay attention to their tone of

voice, what they are doing with their gestures, where they are looking, you

know, that kind of thing.'

Even though the speech instructor was well versed in the concept of nonverbal

communication, listening to her colleague discuss it in the context of foreign

language acquisition changed her understanding of it and enabled her to discuss it

with her students in ways that she previous had not considered. Just as the

Spanish instructor was inspired to enhance his non-learning community courses,

so too was the speech instructor. By taking this new knowledge across borders she

is able to give all of her students the benefits of interdisciplinary teaching and

learning even if they cannot participate in the learning community.

Not only does learning community participation enable instructors to

develop interdisciplinary mindsets and approaches, it allows them to sharpen their

own disciplinary goals and pedagogies. This, in turn, can lead to more positive

and dynamic experiences for students across campus and not just those who are

directly involved in learning communities. As faculty are actively collaborating

inside the classroom and engaging in metacognitive reflection, students are

similarly encouraged to reflect on disciplinary ways of knowing and doing and

examine the ways interdisciplinarity can be used to create new knowledge and

approach 21st-century problems.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This concluding chapter provides several recommendations for how to improve the operations of learning communities, specifically the ones discussed in this study, in light of the information gained through interviewing and observing the instructors. Finally, this chapter offers an overview of potential avenues for further investigation and argues for the continued investigation of learning communities as they relate to a number of pedagogical concerns, including the teaching of disciplinary genres within learning communities, the composing processes of students within these courses, faculty assessment of writing within learning communities, the concept of transfer, and the relatively new practice of guided pathways.

Recommendations for Learning Community Development

An important next step in the continued development of learning communities at this research site is the establishment of best practices regarding learning community implementation. For the most part, learning communities at this institution have benefitted greatly from administrative encouragement and an institutional culture that values creativity and flexibility in pedagogy. However, after interviewing faculty and observing their classrooms, there seems to be three primary ways to optimize learning community benefits for faculty and ensure that interdisciplinary learning and instructors' reflective practices are able to grow as a result of their experiences. While I believe these recommendations can be applied

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to learning communities in general outside the context of this research site, as many of them are confirmed by the recommendations presented by Oscar Lenning, Denise Hill, Kevin Saunders, Alisha Solan, and Andria Stokes's study of learning community programs across the country, these recommendations will take into account the specific ways they could help develop the learning communities featured in this study. The following are three areas for consideration concerning these learning communities:

1. They must be provided opportunities for further learning community-related professional development with other faculty that allows them to reflect on their experiences and further consider the intersections of their disciplines. These opportunities should focus explicitly on the idea of disciplinary identity and what that means within the new context of the learning community.

2. They must be able to spend significant time together in the classroom in order to learn how to merge their content and model interdisciplinary knowledge making for their students.

3. They must be provided administrative support that acknowledges the unique needs of learning communities and addresses issues beyond the control of the instructors.

Opportunities for Professional Development and Further Reflection

Within composition studies it is considered a best practice to provide students with specific opportunities to write about and reflect on their writing processes, their readings, and their experiences collaborating through peer review. We recognize this as a vital part of students' growth as thinkers and writers because reflection allows them to actively consider how and why they approach various rhetorical situations in different ways. However, faculty do not always have the opportunities to engage in these kind of structured reflection activities with their colleagues from other disciplines. Thus, structured reflection should not be limited to students, and it should be actively employed as an institutional strategy for enhancing the teaching and learning occurring within learning communities.

It is clear that the faculty who participate in learning communities at this institution are guided by their disciplinary conventions as they collaborate with their partner from another discipline, as faculty use their disciplines as home referents for assessing and evaluating course content and student work. As experts in their fields and seasoned instructors, they understand what content must be covered in their course and what students need to do in order to meet the expectations established within the discipline. As discussed in the previous chapter, instructors engage in a curriculum assessment and creation process that enables them to consider how their curriculum choices adhere to disciplinary

conventions and expectations; this certainly qualifies as demonstrating self-awareness and engaging in reflection. However, because it seems that learning community participation alone does not necessarily allow instructors to externalize and actively reflect on all aspects of their interdisciplinary engagement, instructors need opportunities outside of the classroom to externalize their learning community experiences. As Lenning et al. state, "the importance of ongoing professional development for faculty in designing, teaching, creating assessments, and assessing integrative experiences cannot be overemphasized" (273). For this reason, I would argue professional development that further encourages discipline-based metacognitive reflection must be viewed as necessary to the success of learning communities.

A potential solution for encouraging this added layer of engagement is to simply create institutional opportunities for reflecting on and processing these experiences. This could take the form of traditional professional development sessions that include some structured and facilitated discussion time aimed at putting a magnifying glass to how and why instructors made decisions about their content and grading practices in the context of the learning community. Because the interview questions used in this study were able to stimulate critical reflection, those same types of questions could be used to promote a dialogue about disciplinary identity and what it looks like to collaborate across disciplines. These sessions could take place multiple times over the course of the academic year and

provide opportunities for periodic check-ins and times of reflection. A more intensive symposium-style event could also be arranged at the beginning or end of the academic year to bring together faculty who are currently working in learning communities and new faculty who are interested in developing more of them.

While this dissertation is not attempting to be a comprehensive manual for developing a learning community program, creating intentional and structured professional development for both new and veteran instructors should be a considered an integral part of sustaining current partnerships and creating new ones at any institution that wants to invest in learning communities. This recommendation also stems from interview conversations, as all of the participating instructors in this study expressed an interest in meeting with other learning community faculty to discuss the benefits and challenges of implementing this kind of pedagogical model. One of their primary areas of interest was finding out if their struggles were unique to them or shared by other faculty who are also engaging in this kind of interdisciplinary, non-traditional teaching arrangement. The study participants exhibited both an attachment to their disciplinary referents and a desire to problematize them and reflect more deeply on them. Allowing them to work through these questions and engage in facilitated discussions with other learning community faculty could help further move these internalized disciplinary "ways of knowing and doing" to the surface and help grow self-awareness through active, discipline-based reflection.

Another reason it makes sense to provide faculty with formal professional development sessions designed to foster reflection is because most of the instructors indicated they had not fully processed through some of the concepts discussed in the interviews until we sat down to talk about them. However, the concepts we discussed in the interviews were issues they had considered but had not articulated to someone else who could help them work through these ideas. For example, when I asked whether the art and geology instructors explicitly told students they needed to shift gears or think differently when approaching art material versus geology material, they stated that it was not something they actively thought about or explained to students, even though it was something they were both somewhat aware of and would occasionally hint at. They did, however, say that it was something they would consider doing in future semesters because once they were asked to actively consider that during the interviews it felt like a more important idea to express to students. This shows that instructors are moving their internalized ideas about discipline and pedagogy to the surface, but they do not always have the chance to make sense of those ideas and discuss them in ways that allow them to make meaning from them and improve the environments of their learning communities.

Notably, the example of the art and geology instructors using the interview as a kind of reflective time was not unique. Within all three interviews there were instances when instructors indicated that they had not given much thought to a

particular question until I asked it during the interview. Consequently, the interviews ended up becoming, in a way, debriefing sessions that allowed the faculty to reflect on their collaborative processes and the expectations they bring to the table as a members of their disciplines. For this reason, it is vital to provide professional development opportunities to these instructors because the act of participating in the interviews helped them to make connections between what they knew to be true as experts in their fields (the need to "shift gears" when moving between the discussions of art and geology) and their ability to articulate that to students, and each other, both inside and outside the classroom.

Finally, providing learning community instructors with professional development opportunities is important because successful collaborative practices need to be learned. As Minnis and John-Steiner argue, those teaching within higher education have been "socialized to prize individual achievement" and the "prevailing reward structure runs counter" to the ideas that underlie collaboration (58). For this reason, interdisciplinary collaboration can sometimes seem like more hassle than it is worth if faculty are left to figure it out on their own. On the other hand, creating an institutional culture that values collaboration and is willing to invest in developing faculty who want to engage in learning community environments would help recalibrate faculty practices to align with the objectives of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Time in the Classroom

My second recommendation for increasing disciplinary self-awareness and reflection opportunities for these learning community faculty is related to the amount of time instructors are able to spend together in the classroom and the importance of shared time to the development and success of the learning communities. Providing adequate time for instructors to collaborate is an important best practice for establishing learning communities because, as Lenning et al. argue, "team teaching and integration *requires* especially close and collaborative instructor relationships" (272). For the learning communities in this study, there were different levels of shared classroom time that reflected the amount of integration the instructors were able to achieve. The instructors of the team-taught course almost always shared the classroom since that is the expected model for team teaching. The art and geology community chose to share the classroom and lab space as much as possible, even though it was not required. This meant that the art instructor was in the learning community classroom and lab for 8 hours a week when she was only receiving credit for teaching a 3-hour class. The geology instructor received credit for the geology lecture and lab, but chose to remain in the classroom for the art appreciation component of the community despite the time sacrifice it required. They certainly could have chosen to spend less time together in the classroom and just shared a set of students, but, from their perspective, the effectiveness of the class was dependent

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on being in the classroom together. On the other hand, the speech and Spanish community chose to keep their courses separate for the most part, due to scheduling and time constraints. But they also realized that their learning community model would be more effective the more they were able to work together. This required them to include several times during the semester when they combined instruction and attended each other's classes, resulting in extra uncredited time during the week. The speech instructor also spent extra time outside of class tutoring and assisting students as they prepared speeches.

The point of mentioning uncredited time in the instructors' schedules is not meant to suggest learning community faculty should log every hour of work related to the learning community in order to be compensated for it. However, it should be recognized that the development and implementation of a learning community requires a considerable amount of time beyond that of planning and implementing a regular, non-learning community course. Furthermore, the success of the course is dependent on the instructors' ability to spend time together in the classroom. Something each of the pairs mentioned in their interviews was the time sacrifice necessary to make the communities operate properly, because spending time together inside the classroom was the most important way the instructors were able to learn how to integrate their content and how to appropriate the tools from their partners' disciplines and recontextualize them within the learning community.

Spending extra time together in the learning community environment also provides student-centered benefits. As discussed in the previous chapter, within the context of the learning community, instructors take on new roles and subject positions that are different from the ones they experience in the context of their non-learning community courses; this has benefits for both the instructors and the students. Instructors understand that these new roles require them to blend the tools and conventions of their other activity systems with the newly created network of the learning community, and actively collaborating in the classroom makes this process visible to students. If instructors are forced to limit their shared classroom time in order to make their schedules sustainable, students will not be able to see instructors modeling interdisciplinary knowledge making. When instructors embody these new roles while in the classroom together, they create opportunities for students to develop as apprentice learners. Students do not often view their instructors as learners because they generally see them as fully-formed experts who have already gone through the process of learning. But when learning community instructors spend time together in the classroom, they spend time embodying the learner role and are able to show students what it looks like to learn through making knowledge connections and asking questions. While it is certainly possible to link two courses through the registrar's office and call it a learning community, the real power of this pedagogical model comes from students and instructors actively collaborating in the classroom and making

knowledge connections across their course content and activities. For this to happen, students need to be able to see faculty sharing the classroom space frequently.

However, the benefits to students are not limited to those enrolled in the learning communities. As I argue in chapter four, instructors are able to learn from one another and take what they learn back to their non-learning community courses. As Russell indicates, this kind of participation in multiple activity systems leads to mutually appropriative systems, where participants bring tools and conventions to the new system and then take newly learned tools and conventions back to more familiar systems. As instructors spend time together in a teaching space, they not only improve the function of the learning community, they learn how to enhance the content and teaching of their non-learning community classes.

This intensive collaboration also acts as a mirror that shows instructors how their personal and professional habits shape their classrooms, and this serves as a type of peer assessment of teaching practices. One of the most important pieces of information gleaned from the observations and interview with this pair is the way shared classroom time highlights an individual instructor's strengths and weakness in ways that allow them to challenge themselves and grow professionally and pedagogically. One area where faculty seemed to be keenly aware of how learning community participation affected them was the way in

which their partner influenced their general teaching practices and their expectations for students and themselves outside the learning community. Each of them were able to quickly pinpoint the ways in which collaboration had influenced them or changed their own habits. They were also readily able to assess their own pedagogical skills and habits in relation to their partner's. All three of the pairs easily identified the more organized instructor or the instructor who favored lectures over activities. The art instructor reported being less organized than the geology instructor, but acknowledged that their collaboration has challenged her in that way. Similarly, the geology instructor feels that watching the art instructor present her content to students has challenged him to try and make his lectures more interactive and conversational when possible.

Peer assessment of teaching practices is uncommon, and even though there are calls for more of this type of activity at the college level, most instructors are only sporadically observed or evaluated by department chairs or administrators. While that kind of evaluation and assessment can be valuable, collaborating in the classroom allows faculty to self-identify their strengths and weaknesses and look for ways to continually improve their pedagogy inside and outside the learning community. Spending time together in the classroom allows for more of this peer review in a manner that is both constructive and self-correcting. In the case of this study, participants reported that working with someone who has different teaching and professional strengths encouraged them

to actively develop those same strengths for the sake of enhancing student learning and the professional atmosphere of the college.

Spending significant time together in the classroom is clearly a critical component of a successful learning community because it allows the instructors to learn more about how their partners operate as teachers but also as experts in their respective fields. This is also confirmed by prior learning community research in which instructors reported feeling the "intense stimulation of discovering each other's disciplines and teaching practices" (MacGregor 9). Allowing learning community faculty more time together in the classroom would certainly require some institutional sacrifices, but it would yield benefits to students and instructors because it serves as built-in professional development for instructors looking to strengthen their pedagogical practices both inside and outside the learning community.

For this reason, making it possible for learning community faculty to spend time together in the classroom without it taking an unsustainable toll on the rest of their schedules benefits the general teaching culture of the institution. Close collaboration across disciplines does not just benefit the small number of learning communities currently operating at this research site. It allows those instructors to return to their "home referent" disciplines and enhance the teaching and learning occurring in all classes. A common theme in the faculty responses from the Lenning et al. study indicate that "there is difficulty of getting full-time

faculty involved in the integrated LC courses when no release time is provided to faculty" (270) because the time commitment tends to go above and beyond that of planning and teaching non-learning community courses. If an institution is willing to view the extra time commitment as an activity that ultimately benefits all instructors and students, then it should be willing to make this extra time commitment sustainable and enticing for those who want to develop and expand learning community options.

Support for Administrative Issues

The third recommendation for these learning communities concerns the institutional support and structure available for making learning communities operate smoothly. When it comes to the administrative component of learning community implementation, there are generally two types of problems that occur. In Lenning's survey of 100 institutions with existing learning community programs, 47% of respondents cited administrative issues, and these issues were either a result of too much administrative buy-in in the form of micromanaging or too little buy-in in the form of inadequate support and infrastructure (257). Administrative micromanaging can be detrimental to the long-term success of learning community programs because their success ultimately depends on them being "faculty inspired and initiated" (Lenning et al. 271). Allowing faculty to self-select and organically organize their community is important to success

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because, just as good faculty matches create a positive learning environment, bad matches can be detrimental to faculty's ability to successfully collaborate.

While listening to the concerns of the faculty represented in this study, all three of the learning community pairs expressed similar struggles regarding their experiences, but none of them were related to the learning community environments themselves or the demands of collaboration—they were all issues that arose before the class officially started. Collaboration in the classroom was the easy part, particularly because the pairs self-selected and chose to be part of the community.

As a result of the interviews, the recommendations regarding administrative support for this study are not about too much administrative buy-in but about too little institutional buy-in. While instructors in this study acknowledged that their administrators are enthusiastic and supportive of learning community creation, there are still infrastructure issues that concern the instructors. While administrators often want the results of innovation and creativity in the classroom, they are not always willing or able to invest in the resources necessary for making these innovations a reality. Institutions that have had the most success with large-scale learning community adoption, such as Evergreen State College, have devoted considerable resources to these programs and have taken on institutional restructuring in order to ensure their success. Unfortunately, the tendency to "disciplinize" and segregate has become so

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ingrained in the bones of most colleges and universities that collaboration across non-teaching areas of the institution can also be difficult to manage. This is damning for many learning communities because the success of the community is often dependent on these administrative factors outside the control of the instructors. Most of these issues occur before the first day of class, and properly mitigating these issues requires the realigning of processes and procedures across campus. This necessitates collaboration between academic advisors, registrars, administrative assistants, and department chairs, among others.

Because addressing these issues requires an institution-wide assessment of priorities and the structures necessary for realizing those priorities, it is not always clear how or where to start restructuring. However, it is important to emphasize the fact that faculty at this research site *want* to participate in learning communities. They are enthusiastic about implementing innovative approaches to teaching. This study provides a snapshot of what learning community faculty are doing in an institution that does not have structured operations for supporting this pedagogical model. Despite this, these faculty are doing innovative things in the classroom to engage their students. Imagine if these faculty had access to additional resources that were dedicated to helping them achieve those goals. Students could be advised early on the benefits of learning community participation so faculty can focus on developing the courses and not just marketing them. Registration processes could be streamlined to prevent students

from registering for only one class because they are not aware it was part of a learning community. Flexible learning spaces could be created to encourage a variety of classroom activities that reflect the diverse nature of interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

All of the above are issues that the faculty in this study had to worry about when deciding whether or not it was feasible to create the learning community they envisioned. If these potential barriers to successful implementation can be addressed at an institutional level, then instructors can focus their time and energy on the important work of discovering new ways to collaborate across disciplines and increase students' interdisciplinary critical thinking skills. An institution cannot buy faculty willingness to innovate, but it is one of the most important factors in developing a faculty of reflective practitioners who continually assess and improve their teaching for the purpose of student success. It is the Pearl of Great Price. For this reason, we must take the opportunity to listen to what learning community faculty need to continue innovating and enhancing the learning community model. We must hear what they have to say regarding this aspect of creating functioning collaborations across disciplines and departments.

Learning community planning sessions and professional development involving both faculty and administrators could prove to be a useful solution to some of these problems, as they could allow faculty new to the learning community process to gain a better understanding of what to expect

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administratively and how to go about marketing the course to help with enrollment numbers. Lenning et al. recommend "vital and motivating professional development in the efficacy of LCs so that administrators, faculty, and students 'buy in' to the concept" (263) and enter into the planning and preparation phases with a common understanding of how to successfully implement academic learning communities.

<u>Avenues for Further Research</u>

In addition to making recommendations regarding the learning communities in this study, this conclusion also aims to identify potential avenues for future research. This dissertation may represent a small piece of the puzzle when it comes to research on learning communities, but my goal is to build a bridge between the current scholarship on learning communities and the work being done in composition and rhetoric with activity theory. It is also my hope that this bridge strengthens existing and future efforts to investigate a number of important topics relating to learning communities, including discussions of disciplinary boundaries, genre studies, student writing inside and outside learning communities, assessment, transfer, and guided pathways.

Disciplinary Boundaries

As Frickel et al. point out, many of the calls for interdisciplinary collaboration rely on the assumption that disciplines are rigid silos that constrain knowledge in ineffectual ways. This, they argue, denies nuanced understandings

of discipline that acknowledge the fluidity of the boundaries that have come to characterize fields. However, there is certainly a lack of evidence regarding the ways interdisciplinary teaching influences disciplinary identity and perceptions. Challenging anecdotal understandings of disciplinary knowledge making, according to Frickel et al., requires additional research into "the nature of boundaries and boundary maintenance" (14). In addition, extending the recent research on disciplinarity from Gere et al. by looking at learning communities as border spaces could further deepen our understanding of what occurs when disciplines meet and speak.

It would also be worth investigating more fully the differences, if any significant ones exist, between learning communities comprised of more disparate fields and ones comprised of more closely aligned disciplines. Research in this area could focus more explicitly on the benefits to students and investigate whether disciplinarity becomes more visible to students when a learning community attempts to merge content from fields that are generally considered to have very different ways of knowing and doing. For example, if I were to measure student perceptions of disciplinary similarities and differences for the learning communities in this study, would the art and geology (two traditionally disparate fields) students have different perceptions than the speech and Spanish students (more closely related fields)? Because this study did not fully investigate student perceptions, it is not possible to directly measure this with the existing data set. In

the case of this study, though, it is clear that the partners from more disparate fields, the art and geology instructors, felt the need to collaborate more closely because they needed more opportunities to learn about their partner's discipline than the other pairs. It is possible that this closer collaboration has an effect on their students' perceptions of discipline.

Genre Studies and Student Writing

Examining genre studies as they relate to learning communities could be useful in identifying ways disciplinary genres change and adapt. As Russell argues, disciplines need to periodically reassess the way they teach writing in response to changing genres across disciplines. If learning communities are borderland spaces where disciplines meet and speak, they could increasingly become sites of genre transformation and adaptation. Based on the information collected from these learning communities, instructors tend to use assignments that are already familiar and then look for ways to recontextualize them for the learning community. Some of these assignments go through more changes than others and some look exactly like the kinds of assignments and writing activities they use in their non-learning community courses. In the case of the team-taught course, the instructors assign writings in a variety of genres, including historiographies, book reviews, and literary analysis. While the course as a collective enterprise relies on multiple genres, the individual assignments

themselves tend to reflect the established and expected conventions of existing historical and literary genres.

However, as learning communities continue to grow and expand, and create new, shared objects as a result of interdisciplinary collaboration, they will continue to appropriate tools and discover new ways to mediate the activity occurring within the community. As this tool appropriation continues across more disciplines, we may see instructors choosing to blend genre conventions to meet the emerging needs of their communities. For this reason, we must pay close attention to how genres begin changing to meet the needs of these epistemic spaces.

Along with expanding the way we conceive of and study genres, we should also consider the composing processes of students as they work in these new spaces alongside faculty. As genres change and adapt to the new contexts created by learning communities, will the composing processes of students change and adapt as well? Does learning community participation have an influence on how students learn to work in disciplinary genres? How will faculty communicate these new genres to student writers? Additionally, will these new genres change the way faculty approach assessment? Could collaborative assessment become a more useful and important practice within the learning community? As previously discussed, collaborative grading could prove to be an important activity for developing faculty's reflective practices and encouraging

them to externalize and rationalize the discipline-based expectations they have when evaluating student work. This kind of collaborative assessment also benefits students by asking them to consider the multiple audiences that could play a role in a given rhetorical situation.

Transfer

Another issue readily connected to and concerning learning communities is student writing within learning communities and the question of transfer. Although Nowacek has argued students transfer knowledge more than we tend to recognize and give them credit for, it could be interesting to investigate the matter of transfer specifically within the learning community site. Because students are being exposed to the connections, similarities, and differences between the disciplines that compose the learning community, do they transfer the knowledge better or even differently than their peers who take courses with traditional, segmented scheduling and do not have instructors explicitly making the connections between their various courses?

The results of this study indicate that students are exposed to knowledge transfer behaviors when watching learning community faculty engage one another in the classroom. Because these behaviors are being modeled for them, it is possible that students in learning communities develop more intuitive understandings of how to make knowledge connections across disciplines and transfer information and tools across disciplinary lines. The transfer-related

observations from this study certainly raise additional questions about the role of learning communities and transfer that could provide fruitful and important answers for our field.

WAC/WID Programs

We certainly need more investigation into how learning communities can work in conjunction with the goals of WAC/WID programs. Zawacki and Williams have looked at how WAC pedagogy can be informed by learning community programs, but there is still a lot to be examined in terms of how faculty can work together to facilitate writing programs that enhance writing within and across disciplinary instruction. WID programs can also work with learning communities to highlight the ways writing within the disciplines requires close attention to the rhetorical situations occurring within those disciplines. The participants in this study generally assigned writing tasks that adhered to traditional disciplinary genres, and none of the assignment instructions explicitly highlighted the rhetorical situations that drive disciplinary expectations. This is, perhaps, an issue that structured professional development can also address in order to encourage faculty to assess the role of writing in their learning community courses and examine the way the expectations of the community influence the writing assignments they construct.

Future study could also take more systematic investigations into the kinds of writing students actually produce in response to the writing assignments given

in learning communities. While the scope of this study did not allow for the collection and analysis of student artifacts, it could be worthwhile to examine how students respond to learning community assignments compared to non-learning community students at WAC/WID institutions.

Guided Pathways

Finally, researching the usefulness of the learning community model in relation to guided pathways models could be particularly useful for this institution as it currently works toward the implementation of guided pathways across the institution. Guided pathways are becoming an important concept at the community college level in particular because they emphasize and clarify paths that would lead students from the beginning of their education through to graduation. The guided pathways model also emphasizes knowledge connections across courses and encourage students, and faculty, to think about the big picture of learning and knowledge making. This ties into work being done by the Washington Center at Evergreen State College, as recent work emerging from that institution is committed to investigating the benefits of coordinating learning communities to work in conjunction with the guided pathways model. Learning communities and guided pathways have both been shown to increase retention and student engagement, and research that accounts for both of these models could help illuminate new faculty roles as they relate to guided pathways.

Creating learning communities within the context of guided pathways is an important step for maximizing student outcomes in learning communities for a variety of reasons. In *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins state that learning communities may not make a substantial difference in long-term student outcomes when they exist outside the normal order and are not fully integrated into the structure of the college. They argue the learning community model "faces an uphill battle against norms of disconnected courses and a culture of instructional isolation" (93). The guided pathways model, which focuses on restructuring all campus activities to promote seamless movement through the system, can improve learning community function by increasing their numbers and making collaboration across disciplines a more regular and expected activity. It would also address a number of institutional and administrative issues that faculty seem to face before their courses can be implemented.

Conclusion

While there is still much to be discovered regarding learning communities and their ability to bridge knowledge gaps and create space for new forms of knowledge making and collaboration, it is clear that learning communities have the potential to provide faculty with growth and experiences unlike many of the other professional development opportunities to which faculty tend to have access. As all the instructors interviewed for this study explained, their

experiences participating in the communities are usually the highlight of their semesters. They enjoy working with colleagues across disciplines and they find the model to be challenging and rewarding for students as well. When the benefits to faculty are compounded with the benefits to students, it is clear that this pedagogical model is fostering deeper levels of engagement inside and outside the learning community classroom.

As institutions of higher education continue discussing how to provide students with meaningful, critical thinking-infused learning environments, we should look to learning communities to provide rich and challenging opportunities for faculty to reflect on their disciplinary identity and develop the kind of interdisciplinary courses that will allow students to become 21st-century thinkers and problem solvers. However, we must also be willing to support these programs and make it possible for the model to become a sustainable and enticing part of faculty schedules. This means creating professional development opportunities that tie into the learning community experience and promote critical thinking and structured reflection. It also means restructuring and realigning a variety of campuses services to mitigate the obstacles to creating and implementing sustainable communities. Some of this may seem a tall order, but as we reframe what it means for students to succeed and place higher value on interdisciplinary knowledge making and collaboration, it will be critical to provide students with the kinds of curricular models that are best equipped to serve those ends.

Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Dear _____:

I am conducting a study on learning communities and how faculty collaborate with instructors from different disciplines. The project is a case study, and my data collection includes interviews with learning community faculty and the collection of course documents from learning community courses (ICRs and assignment prompts). My hope is that this study will lay the foundation for future research on the best practices for learning community curriculum construction. If you are interested in participating in this project, I have attached an informed consent letter for you to read. If you decide to participate, please print a copy of the letter and sign it at the bottom. You can place the signed copy in my campus mailbox. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any point in the study without consequence.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Perry

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Dear _____:

I am conducting a study that examines the collaborative practices of faculty members teaching in learning communities on this campus. The purpose of this research is to better understand how a faculty member's membership in a particular academic discipline has an effect on the way they collaborate with an instructor from a different discipline.

Your participation in this study will require one hour-long interview near the beginning of the spring 2017 semester and the submission of supporting documents, which includes your learning community ICR and any documents you give students that outline the requirements for the major assignments.

There will be no financial benefits associated with participation in this study. There is little to no risk anticipated with this study. However, all information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner so that no one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded/reported. Digital recordings of interviews will be encrypted and stored on a hard drive that will remain in a locked cabinet when not in use. Hardcopy data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office. Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study simply contact me via telephone or email.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study. For Institutional Review Board questions, please contact the Institutional Review Board chair.

Sincerely,

Melissa Perry

I am willing to participate in a follow-up interview at the end of the spring 2017 semester if necessary: Yes   No

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Signature of subject:

Date:

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Is this your first experience with a learning community? If not, how long have you been participating in academic learning communities on this campus specifically? How long have you worked with this specific faculty member?

2. Why did you want to participate in a learning community?

3. Did you always plan to work with this particular partner or did you simply want to work with another faculty member from that field?

4. Does your learning community have a particular theme or focus? If it does, why did you choose that theme?

5. Why do you think your course content pairs well with your partner's course content?

6. Since working together, have you identified differences in the way you each approach assignment construction?

7. Have you had to modify any of your existing assignments to fit into your LC curriculum? If you did, how did you modify them?

8. Do any of the assignments in your class get counted for a grade in your partner's class? If they do, do you assess student work separately or together?

9. What do you see as the intended learning outcomes for your course? What do you want students to know or be able to do when they leave your course?

10. How do you see your learning outcomes aligning with your partner's course learning outcomes?

11. Do you feel like these learning outcomes are ever at odds?

12. In your field of study, what constitutes "good communication"?

13. What kind of written documents are your students expected to produce in your class?

14. Do you require particular formatting or citation standards?

15. Do you ever discuss with your students the differences between your academic field and your partners?

Appendix D

Codebook Sample

Interview Codes	Application	Example
Object	Applied to statements regarding the goals/objectives/motivations of the learning community curriculum	"So, we want to find as many areas as possible where we can bring topics together and show how they are linked."
Tool	Applied to statements regarding the materials and resources utilized in the learning community	"It is almost like a baking recipe instead of a chemistry equation to make these chemicals we are using."
Role/Labor	Applied to statements regarding the discussion of what each faculty member contributes to class time or planning sessions and what tasks they take on to facilitate the course.	"He actually put all of his lessons in the course schedule and I didn't. So, each week we would talk about how I could bring them together and I would make the new lecture and the new material to match with his schedule."
Own Disc	Applied to statements where the speaker discusses their own disciplinary identity, refers to the activities of their discipline, or refers to their discipline's epistemology.	"If you are asking questions with the content I cover, there is a right or wrong answer."
Other Disc	Applied to statements where the speaker discusses what they perceive to be their partner's disciplinary identity, refers to the activities of their partner's discipline, or refers to that discipline's epistemology.	"With her it is more subjective, based on opinion."

Document Codes	Application	Example
Object	Applied to statements that explain to students the goals/objective/motivations of the learning community.	"The content taught in these courses and several projects or other activities completed during the semester will demonstrate a relationship between science and the arts."
Structure	Applied to statements that explain to students the format/organization of course activities, processes, or procedures.	"You will have separate course blackboards for the two courses. Your instructors have tried to structure them as similarly as possible to avoid confusion but you will need to visit each regularly."
Difference	Applied to statements that indicate contrast between the approach to material or the disciplinary expectations.	"This is not a research paper. This is a formal literary paper."

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