

Creating Learning Communities

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Editorial

Learning communities can be traced back to John Dewey and the 1930s. At that time, Dewey promoted active learning that was students centred and had a shared inquiry. In the recent past, in the 1990s, Milton Fox introduced faculty or staff learning communities. These were faculty and staff who came together to learn about different topics. These communities were multidisciplinary and operated across campuses.

So what are learning communities? They are a group or cohort of individuals who decides to engage in a learning process about a specific topic. The group establishes processes of communication and inquiry in order to come to some greater understanding together that may not have been possible had each group member embarked on the learning process individually. I believe this may be similar to what Gadamar called “fusion of horizons.” In these group situations, individuals have dialogues about their understanding from their specific perspective without trying to convert individuals to their position but, rather, to provide specific perspectives. Then all the participants listen to another individual’s perspective so as to bring together all the perspectives. This is done with the active participation of all members. This is a learning community. Traditionally, learning communities have operated face to face. Yet, as we become more comfortable with technology, we can have learning communities that are online and international. Also, learning communities are created with students in our classrooms as Dewey promoted or with faculty/staff/administration or with a cross-section of people and disciplines.

This issue was a chance for our colleagues who are engaged in the traditional face-to-face learning community and those who are using technology to share with us their experiences. Although we have had many submissions, being a peer-reviewed journal, we are not able to publish them all. What you will see in this issue are a range of articles about the experiences of faculty. I believe you will be able to transfer the ideas into your own classes. You can use the ideas from each article to create your own classroom’s learning community. After all, the intent of this journal is to create a learning community, one where we all can read, ponder and dialogue.