



California Learning Communities Consortium 2009 Curriculum Retreat

# The Learning Community Advantage

## A theory of change for contemporary times

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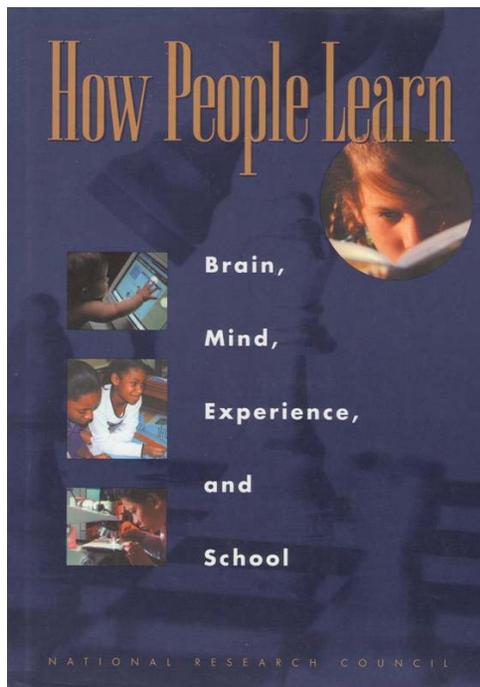


## Keynote Overview

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



## Research on “learning”

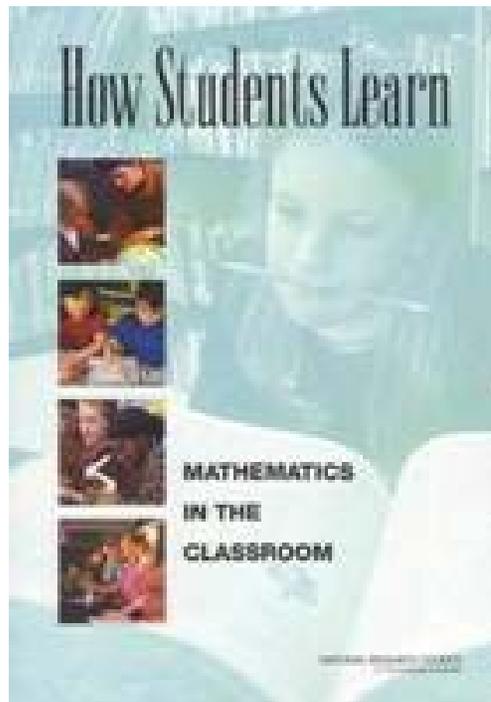


### Three foundational principles

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



## Research on discipline-specific learning



How experts differ from novices

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



## What do expert academic readers and writers...

Know...

What do we **know** as readers and writers?

Do...

What **do** we do as readers and writers?

For what purposes...

**Why** do we read and write in academia?

How do we share our work?

**What forms** do our reading and writing take?



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

Know...

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

Do...

Are we asking students—even beginning students—to do what we do as experts, scaled at an appropriate level?

For what purposes...

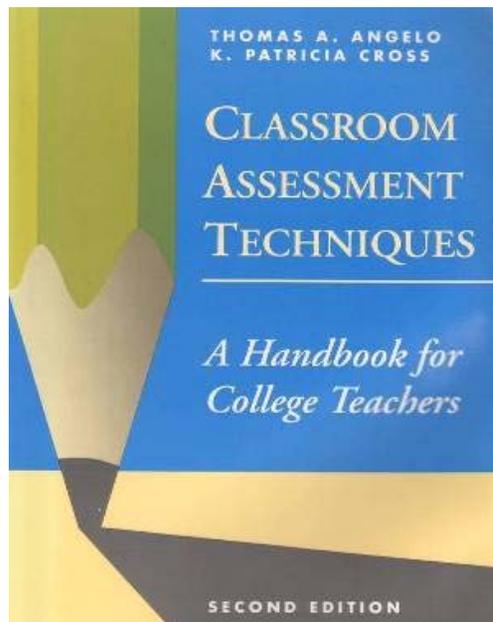
Are we creating possibilities for students' work to be purposeful in the ways that our own work is purposeful?

In what forms?

Are we introducing students to a similar range of forms?



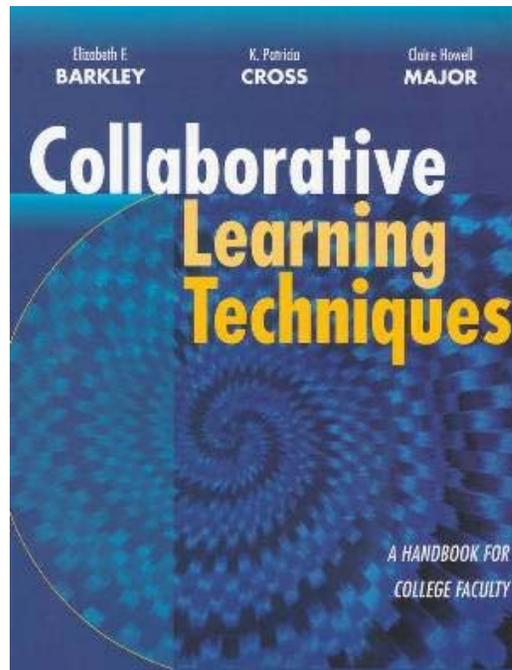
## Classroom Assessment Techniques



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



## Collaborative Learning Techniques



Students are learning how to learn “something,” developing agency and authorship, constructing meaning, examining an issue as a ( ) might...using the big ideas of the discipline or field of study, the practices, the aims...



## Abilities-based education

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

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

Possess knowledge ⇨ Use knowledge in the world

*Self-Assessment as Learning, Alverno College Faculty*



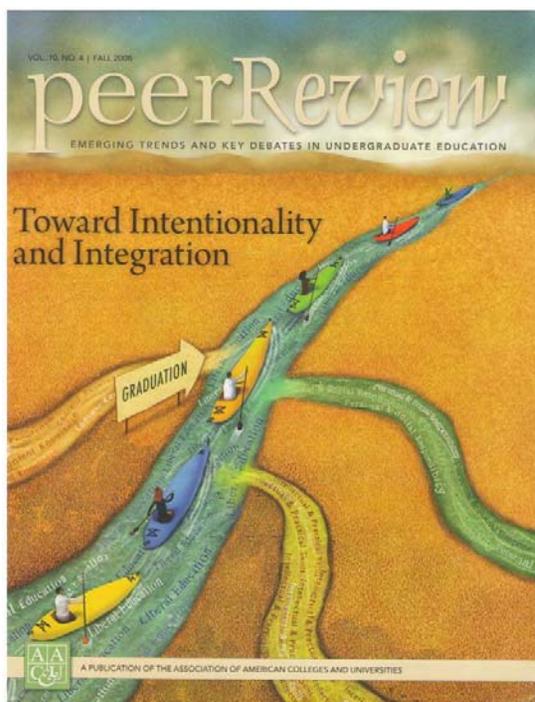
# The Essential Learning Outcomes

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

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



## Integrative learning as a “21<sup>st</sup> century liberal art”



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

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



❖ What kind of learning do learning communities make possible?

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

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



## Elements of interdisciplinary learning

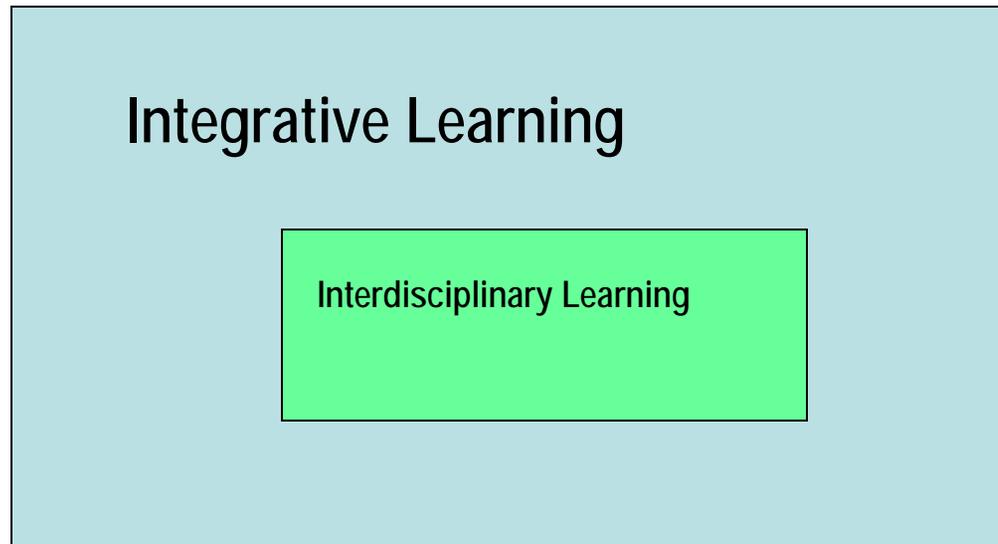
“Interdisciplinary work integrates knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines. Such work embraces the goal of advancing understanding (e.g. explain phenomena, craft solutions, raise new questions,) in ways that would have not been possible through single disciplinary means. ”

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



## Making a critical distinction while recognizing a fundamental habit of mind

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





## To do either integrative or interdisciplinary learning you need “disciplinary grounding”

### Knowledge

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

### Methods

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

### Purposes

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

### Forms of communication

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

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



## Theory of Change: Three Critical Dimensions

Learning communities as a means for increasing student achievement

1<sup>st</sup> dimension: Strategically-placed cohorts

2<sup>nd</sup> dimension: Integrative and applied learning

3<sup>rd</sup> dimension: Professional learning community



## 1<sup>st</sup> Dimension: Strategically-placed cohorts

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



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Dimension: Integrative learning projects

- ❖ Core concepts (and practices) for both courses
- ❖ Applied to contemporary issue
- ❖ Appropriate scaffolding including separate disciplinary assignments



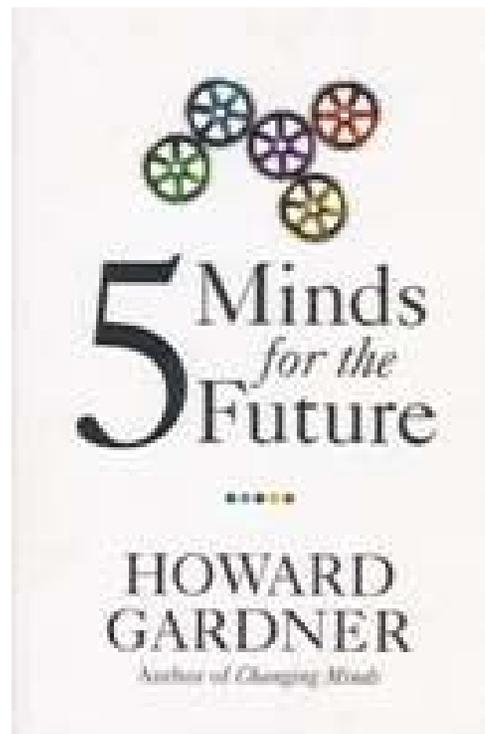
## 3<sup>rd</sup> Dimension: Professional learning community

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



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

Peer Review, Spring 2007, Carol Geary Schneider



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

~ Howard Gardner, 2008



## Disciplined Mind

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

## Synthesizing Mind

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

## Creating Mind

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

## Respectful Mind

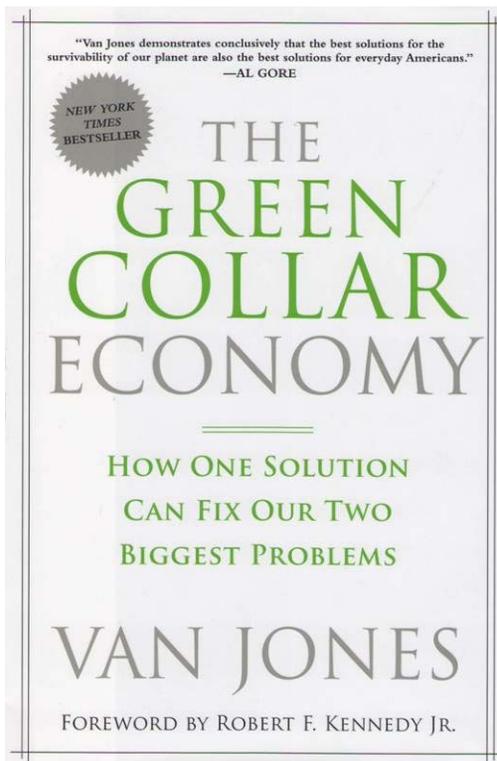
Responding sympathetically and constructively to differences among individuals and among groups; seeking to understand and work with those who are different; extending beyond mere tolerance and political correctness

## Ethical Mind

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



## The real work is just beginning.



"Cash-strapped, economically fearful families are emerging as the swing constituency on climate policy. The only way to draw them into the coalition for real solutions is by delivering fully on the promise of a green economy that provides increased work, wealth, and health for them and their children.

Delivering on that promise is the great work of the new century. The real work is just beginning."