Experiences of Academic Engagement and Classroom Community in Learning Communities

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Kansas State University
Campus Context
Campus Context: Kansas State University

• Kansas State University

• Campus Culture

• Brief History of FYE at Kansas State

• K-State First
K-State First: Programs

- CAT Communities: Learning Communities
- First-Year Seminars
- KSBN: Common Reading Program
- GPS (Guide to Personal Success): One-on-One Mentoring Program
K-State First: Area for Expansion

• *Residential Learning Communities*

• Growth of CAT Communities at K-State:

  - Fall 2010: 6 = 2 Residential | 4 Non-Residential
  - Fall 2012: 14 = 2 Residential | 11 Non-Residential | 1 Study Abroad
  - Fall 2014: 23 = 6 Residential | 16 Non-Residential | 1 Study Abroad
  - Fall 2015: 36 = 21 Residential | 15 Non-Residential | 2 Study Abroad

• 4 of this year’s RCCs supported by grant from Suder Foundation
Residential CAT Communities: Structure

- Two linked general education courses
- One small interactive connections course
- Multiple co-curricular events

- Built around area of student interest
- Located together in same residence hall
- Led by faculty member, who teaches connections course & one gen ed course
- Co-led by peer mentor (“Residential Learning Assistant”)

- CAT Community leaders are trained and compensated
CAT Communities: Learning Outcomes

• Critical Thinking

• Communication Skills

• Community Building

• Application of Learning
CAT Communities: Performance Highlights

• Better First-Year Persistence: 87.4% versus 81.9% (2013 cohort)

• Better GPA’s: 2.99 versus 2.92

• Better Teaching Evaluations: 4.4 average on 5.0 scale (77% above IDEA Database average)

• Average ACT scores of CAT Community students and non-participants are virtually identical (~24.5).
Residential CAT Communities: Performance This Past Semester (Fall 2014)

• Better First-Semester Persistence: 98.8% versus 93.3%

• Better First-Semester GPA’s: 3.27 versus 2.95

• Better Teaching Evaluations: 4.88 out of 5.0 (86%): half were perfect 5.0/5.0, another one-third were at 4.9/5.0

• ACT Scores: 23.3 (RCC students) versus 24.6 (non-participants)
Learning Communities
What is a Learning Community (LC)?

• Integrated comprehensive programs in which transformative learning takes place through community process as students develop professionally, civically, and ethically (Brown & Dettinger, 1998).

• Usually linked in terms of a theme or subject areas (or area of student interest)

• Designed to support the integration of academic content

• Designed to provide social relationships
What do LCs do?

• Fosters a Sense of Community (Lichtenstein, 2005)
  • Promotes personal connection through shared intellectual experience
  • Promotes engagement and knowledge integration through collaborative learning
  • Facilitates student-faculty interaction inside and outside the classroom

• Provides a support network and engages students more fully in academic life at the institution (Tinto, 1997)

• Promotes personal connection through shared intellectual experiences, engagement and knowledge integration through collaborative learning (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008)
How do LCs affect students?

• **Enhanced academic performance** (Lord, Coston, Davis, & Johannes, 2012; Zheng, Saunders, Shelley, & Whalen, 2002)
  - GPA & Study Habits

• **Increased student engagement and involvement, satisfaction with college experience, and better career preparation** (Engstrom & Tinto 2007; Lord et al., 2012; Rocconi, 2012; Stassen, 2003; Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, & Lindblad 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004)

• **Allows for friendship formation and greater sense of community** (Jaffee, Carle, Phillips, & Paltoo, 2008)
Study 1
Study 1 Research Question

• Do learning community participants experience a sense of community in the classroom?
Study 1 Method

• Students completed a measure of classroom community
  • During the first and last meetings of their class in the Fall 2013 semester

• 83 students were enrolled in learning communities
• 384 students were enrolled in first-year seminars
Classroom Community Measure

- Classroom Community Scale (CCS; Rovai, 2001)
- 20 items, response scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
- 1. Perceived “Connectedness” in the course
  - E.g., I feel connected to others in this course
- 2. Perceived “Learning” in the course
  - E.g., I feel that I am encouraged to ask questions
- 3. Overall Classroom Community
Overall Community Results

LC vs FYS Time:
\[ F(1, 465) = 41.45, p < .001 \]

Class:
\[ F(1, 465) = 10.07, p = .002 \]

TxC:
\[ F(1, 465) = 0.10, p = .752 \]
Study 1 Conclusions

• Learning Community students reported levels of classroom community:
  • At relatively high levels on the first day of class
  • At significantly higher levels on the last day of class
  • That were significantly higher than those reported by FYS students

• Learning Community students are experiencing a community
Study 2 Research Question

• Do learning community participants experience community and academic engagement differently in their learning communities than in other courses?
Study 2 Method

• Students were invited to complete measures of classroom community, academic engagement, etc.
  • About one month into the Fall 2014 semester
  • About two weeks prior to the end of the Fall 2014 semester

• 69 students were enrolled in learning communities
  • Five different LCs were represented
  • Offered measures for both their LC and a large (interconnected) course

• 364 students were not enrolled in learning communities
  • Offered measures only for the large course
Participation Rates

Pretest

Posttest

LC
Large Class
Classroom Community Measure

• Classroom Community Scale (CCS; Rovai, 2001)
• 20 items, response scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
Academic Engagement Measure

- Academic Engagement Scale (Rupayana & Fullagar, 2008)
- 16 items, response scale of agreement from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much)

1. Intrinsic Motivation
   - E.g., I feel good when doing work for this class

2. Absorption
   - E.g., I am very absorbed in my work for this class

3. Dedication/Challenge
   - E.g., I often felt proud of the work that I did for this class

4. Vigor
   - E.g., I often feel energized by the work in this class

5. Overall Academic Engagement
Community Relationships

Pre-Community in LC  \[ \rightarrow \]  Post-Community in LC

Pre-Community in Large  \[ \rightarrow \]  Post-Community in Large

\[ .38^+ \]
\[ .55^* \]
\[ .50^* \]
\[ .08 \]
\[ .42^* \]
\[ .28 \]
Engagement Relationships

- Pre-Engagement in LC → Post-Engagement in LC: 0.28
- Pre-Engagement in Large → Post-Engagement in Large: 0.51*
- Pre-Engagement in Large → Post-Engagement in LC: 0.38*
- Post-Engagement in LC → Pre-Engagement in Large: 0.29
- Post-Engagement in Large → Pre-Engagement in LC: 0.21
- Post-Engagement in Large → Post-Engagement in Large: -0.01
Community in LC

One Month  End of Semester

CCS: $t(26) = 0.17$, $p = .868$
Engagement in LC

Engage: $t(26) = 0.28, p = .786$
Community in LC versus Large Class (LC Students)

LC: \( t(26) = 0.17, p = 0.868 \)

Large: \( t(22) = 3.11, p = 0.005 \)
Engagement in LC versus Large Class (LC Students)

LC: $t(26) = 0.28, p = .785$

Large: $t(22) = 3.20, p = .004$
Community in Large Class (LC versus No LC Students)

Time: $F(1, 78) = 28.24, p < .001$
Time X LC: $F(1, 78) = 1.18, p = .281$
Engagement in Large Class (LC versus No LC Students)

One Month

End of Semester

LC

No LC

Time: $F(1, 81) = 25.04, p < .001$

Time X LC: $F(1, 81) = 0.01, p = .935$
Additional Items

• 3 items, response scale of agreement from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much)
• Do you feel like being a part of your CAT Community helps you to achieve your educational goals?
• Do you feel like you have contributed to your CAT Community?
• Do you feel like your Learning Assistant has helped create a positive learning community?
**Additional Items**

- **LC Helped:**
  - One Month: $t(25) = 0.65$, $p = 0.523$
  - End of Semester: $t(25) = 1.40$, $p = 0.175$

- **Contributed to LC:**
  - One Month: $t(26) = 1.89$, $p = 0.069$

- **LA Helped:**
  - End of Semester: $t(26) = 1.40$, $p = 0.175$
Do you feel like being a part of your CAT Community helps you to achieve your educational goals?

• *It provides me with many resources and people to go to if I need help or have any questions that I need answered and I would not be able to access these resources without the CAT community.*

• *Being a part of my CAT Community helps me achieve by helping me connects several topics together. It's a place where we can discuss certain issues more in depth. The CAT Community is also great place to find people that can help you in your classes.*

• *It allows me to open up and stay organized. I can apply this in other courses*
Do you feel like you have contributed to your CAT Community?

• We all contribute to our community by helping each other with questions or concerns and having each other’s back whenever they need it.

• I keep the conversations going; I spark interest in what we learn. I try to be as supportive as possible when we get together as a group.

• We created a very strong community and we each had our own roles in creating that community... just being friendly and open to others was my way to help create a strong bond between all of us.
Do you feel like your Learning Assistant has helped create a positive learning community?

• Our Learning Assistant provides us with many resources to help us succeed at college and she is very passionate about our education.
• Our learning assistant has helped make our group more of a community.
• They have contributed by making us feel comfortable and connected and really valuing what everyone has to offer.
• She has helped us get and stay connected.
# Academic Performance in Large Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Domain</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Grade (%)</td>
<td>LC (89.7%) &gt; No LC (84.1%)</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Final (%)</td>
<td>LC (86.5%) &gt; No LC (83.8%)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam Average (%)</td>
<td>LC (86.5%) &gt; No LC (83.6%)</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter Quizzes (%)</td>
<td>LC (91.8%) &gt; No LC (86.6%)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>LC &gt; No LC</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra Points</td>
<td>LC &gt; No LC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>LC &gt; No LC</td>
<td>*</td>
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Study 2 Conclusions

• Learning community students experienced more community and engagement in their learning communities than in the large course.

• These experiences did not transfer to their experiences in the large course.

• However, learning community students outperformed students not involved in learning communities on several academic performance areas in the large class.
Study 2 Conclusions

In our students’ own words:

• *It taught me many valuable skills needed to go through some of the other classes I had.*

• *They make me want to do better in everything I do.*
Conclusions
Overall Conclusion

• Learning communities are associated with students’ experiencing greater levels of classroom community and academic engagement

• Further, these experiences of community and engagement in learning communities help to foster students’ success both within and beyond the learning community classroom
Put Simply and Generally

- Fostering a sense of community and engagement in your own classroom will benefit your students beyond your four walls
Our Next Steps and Next Questions

• Building on strengths of residential, faculty-led learning communities
• Preparing faculty to lead learning communities
• Examining the future impacts of learning community involvement
• Identifying and measuring the processes that drive these impacts
Thank you!

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References


